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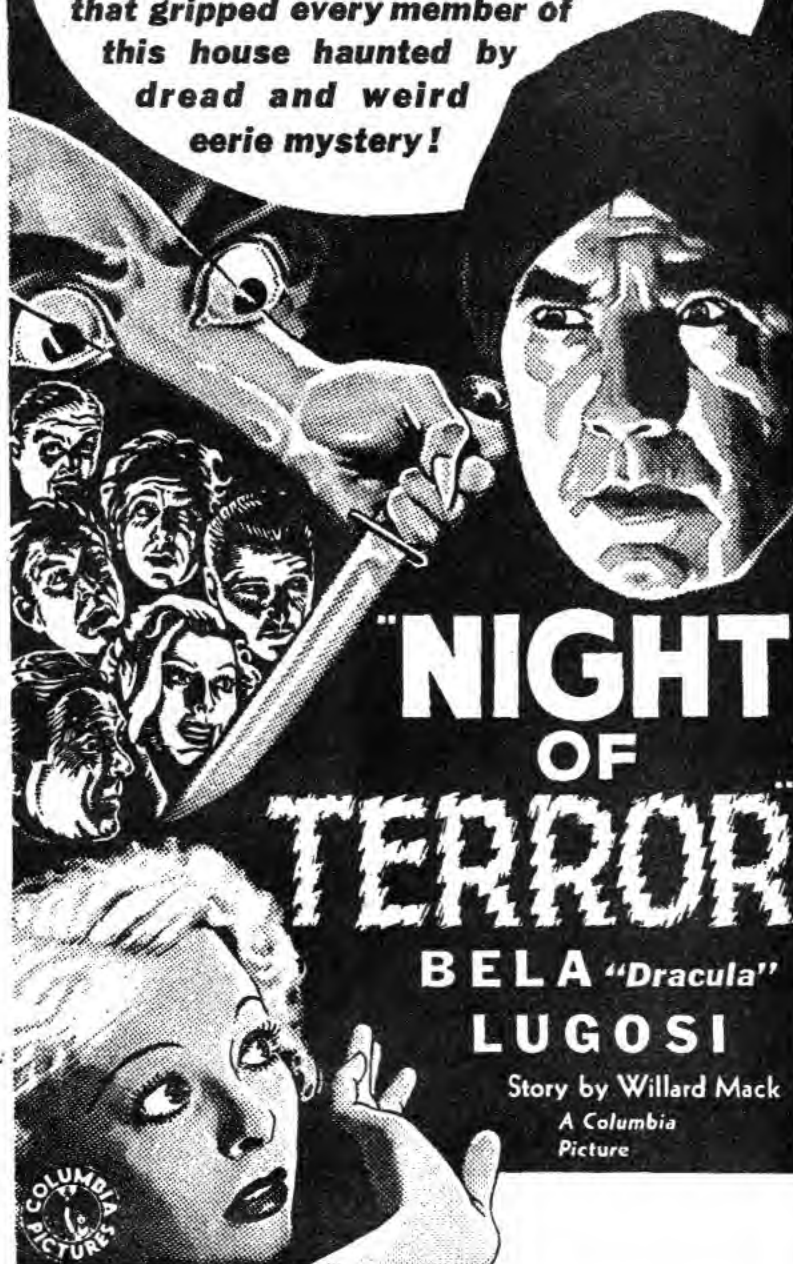


BELA "Dracula" LUGOSI
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A Columbia Picture

SCREAMS
soon silenced forever!

SHADOWS
that murderously strike in the dark!

TERROR
*that gripped every member of
this house haunted by
dread and weird
eerie mystery!*



**"NIGHT
OF
TERROR"**

**BELA "Dracula"
LUGOSI**

Story by Willard Mack
A Columbia
Picture

CULT MOVIES

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**This issue dedicated to the untiring efforts of
our Japanese film authority, David G. Milner.**

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Cult Movies

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deep inside cult movies

Yes, we are liars - but we didn't intend to bel Last issue we announced that there would be no more essays from our film culture annalist, Mr. Frank Dello Stritto. The word had come down that his article on the "British Horror Ban" would be his last. The very day on which that issue was printed, Frank called to announce his idea for a study on the Mummy films which we are featuring for your enjoyment. In a case like this, I suppose we should be delighted to be fibbers!

More and more I am prone to think of our magazine in the context of a shopping mall. Bela Lugosi, Godzilla, and Ed Wood have been staple stores every bit as vital as Bon Marche, Nordstrom and May Company stores would be to the shopping center. But as *Cult Movies* readers stroll through our zine, page by page, they'll be treated to a changing array of film subjects; the HK action, the antique erotica, the Italian sword & sandal, and so forth. Genres that aren't quite so mainstream cult. Sometimes it's hard to know what one will encounter from one issue to the next, and as a rule our readers do approve of this random and omnibus approach. This issue is full of these "lesser cult" topics, and it would be redundant to enumerate them all here; you'll discover them on your own as you go window shopping through our current mall.

The one exception I'll make is to site the article by Chris D. Not surprisingly, it's all about his specialty, the Samurai films - this time the supernatural influence on these films. We were told to expect a short piece from Mr. Chris (not Miss Chris as a few love-lorn film fans have hoped in their fan mail to us!!!). When the article was finally presented, it was every bit as voluminous as the Los Angeles telephone book and thus will be broken into two parts. Part one is on display here, today; the balance of the article will be presented in our next issue.

NEW! DIFFERENT! SHOCKING!
The KINGS of HORROR
BATTLE to the DEATH!



ALL NEW! ALL COLOR!

TOGETHER IN ONE FILM - THEY MEET IN A FIGHT OF FRIGHT

DRACULA vs. FRANKENSTEIN

J. CARROLL NAISH LON CHANEY ANTHONY EISLEY
 REGINA CARROL ANGELO ROSSITTO
 RUSS TAMBLYN JIM DAVIS

COLOR by DeLuxe INDEPENDENT-INTERNATIONAL GP

Here's a news flash from our Vincent Price author, Mr. Bob Madison. He's announced that Bela Lugosi Jr. and Sara Karloff, the children of Bela Lugosi and Boris Karloff, respectively, will make a rare East Coast appearance at the annual Friends of Old Time Radio Convention this Octo-

ber. The convention runs from Thursday to Saturday, October 19-21, at the Holiday Inn North, in Newark, New Jersey.

Mr. Lugosi and Mrs. Karloff-Sparkman will be featured on a panel hosted by Bob Madison on Thursday evening. There they will speak about their celebrated fathers, play radio clips, and answer questions. Also scheduled for the convention weekend are live recreations of such famous horror programs as *Lights Out* and *Arsenic and Old Lace*, in which Karloff and Lugosi will take active parts.

Other guests will include Raymond Edward Johnson from *Inner Sanctum*. For more information on the convention, contact Jay Hickerson (203)248-2887 or Bob Madison (212)595-1044.

It was like a scene out of one of Al Adamson's films when, after 18 hours of digging in the dirt and concrete beneath the newly laid tile floor, police investigators discovered the linen wrapped, decomposing body of - Al Adamson. Producer of such notorious drive-in attractions as *Dracula vs. Frankenstein* and *Satan's Sadists*, the 66-year-old Adamson had been missing for five weeks when an anonymous tip led officers to dig up the floor in Adamson's home in Indio, California, near Palm Springs. As we go to press, an autopsy is being performed, and a known suspect is being extradited back to the state from Florida. Next issue we'll have a full report, and many tributes to the late Mr. Adamson by his contemporary filmmakers and friends. (Shown here is Gray Morrow's ad art for a 1971 Adamson monster rally.)

But, enough of the prelude! We have tons of fun in store for you, and we're anxious to get to it. This issue of *Cult Movies* is no mere mini-mall; this is a gigantic, super mall, filled to the heavens with wonderful astounding filmic adventures! Have a good time shopping!

Sincerely,
Michael Copner,
 Editor

TABOO VIDEO

Films below are in English.

AMAZON JAIL
 Super-nasty women's prison picture; plenty o' sex-n-rape! XXX.

BARE BEHIND BARS
 Uncut X-rated version! Juicy women's prison sex shocker!!!

BEYOND DARKNESS
 Uncut "Buried Alive"! Necrophiliac slut-slaughtering horror from Joe D'Amato! X.

CALIGULA 2: THE UNTOUCHED STORY
 Uncut XXX-rated version!!! Perverted sex & death in the Roman Empire with Laura Gemser. Directed by D'Amato.

CANNIBAL HOLOCAUST
 Uncut, uncensored & X-rated!!! Notorious rape-filled gorefest.

THE DEMONS
 Lesbian nuns do it for the Devil! Sex-n-torture treats from Jesus Franco. X-rated.

EMANUELLE IN AMERICA
 Totally uncut XXX-rated version! Laura Gemser must suck & fuck her way across the U.S. to stop a crazed cult of murderous rapists on the rampage! Directed by D'Amato.

FORCED ENTRY
 Sex-crazed Vietnam vet rapes, tortures and murders sexy young girls! XXX-rated.

GESTAPO'S LAST ORGY
 Uncut X-rated version! Flesh-eating Nazi cannibals indulge in orgies & atrocities with screaming naked prisoners... Yum, yum! Save me some!

GHOUL SEX SQUAD
 Subtitled in English. Vampire rapists terrify naked girls and battle kung-fu wizards! XXX.

HOTEL PARADISE
 Uncut XXX-rated version! Ajita Wilson stars in jungle prison-camp hell. Raped and tortured female inmates wreak revenge!

MIND FUCK
 Subtitled in English. Kung-fu hardcore featuring nines and vampires sinking their teeth into flesh, hot poontang! XXX.

NAKED EXORCIST
 Devil-worshipping psychos sacrifice naked girls to the Prince of Darkness! X-rated.

NAZI LOVE CAMP 27
 Uncut XXX-rated version! Sadistic Nazi bastards beat and brutalize concentration camp cuties! ...You'll love it!!!

NIGHT OF THE SORCERERS
 Uncut X-rated version! Voodoo maniacs whip ALL the clothes off white chicks, then cut off their heads & turn 'em into nympho-vampires! Creepy.

POOR CECILY
 Uncut X-rated version! Sex slaves must suffer the ultimate humiliation and dungeon torture in this big-budget 70s classic. A must-see!

SLAVES IN CAGES
 Rich maniac kidnaps sexy girls to keep as animalistic sex slaves in his secret dungeon torture palace. He puts on a "show" for his sick friends. ...You will, too! X-rated.

SS EXTERMINATION CAMP
 Uncut X-rated version! The most vile Nazi sex and torture movie since "ILSA"! A must.

Films below are NOT in English.

DER HEXENTÖTER VON BLACKMOOR
 Uncut German version of Franco's "NIGHT OF THE BLOOD MONSTER" with Christopher Lee! Sex-n-gore witchcraft/horror. X.

MACUMBA SEXUAL
 Ajita Wilson stars as a sex-crazed sorceress kidnapping Lina Romay for perverted black magic rituals at her kinky castle! Directed by sleazy favorite Jesus Franco. X-rated.

PERVERSE COUNTESS
 Uncut XXX-rated version! Lina Romay is captured for sex by crazy cannibal nympho-queen! Directed by Jesus Franco.

VIRGINS FOR ROME
 Non-stop orgies in ancient Rome from Joe D'Amato! XXX.

TERROR

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THE MASTERS OF EROTIC HORROR

Letters

Dear Cult Movies,

A "mainstream" television series is not the sort of material usually covered in *Cult Movies*, but as a baby boomer who watches *Superman* on Nick at Nite I applaud Jan Alan Henderson's "bookazine" on George Reeves. Henderson conducted numerous interviews with people who actually knew the subject, and assembled an impressive anecdotal history of Reeves' life and career. The depth of the research tempts me to dub the author "Inspector Henderson."

I was intrigued by Henderson's comparison of George Reeves and Bela Lugosi. Both men became identified with formidable characters (*Superman* and *Dracula*). These classic characters made the actors world famous and eventually made them immortal cultural icons. Conversely, the same characters seemed to haunt the actors like some candy-coated curse, and contributed much frustration and unhappiness to their lives.

I recall Noel Neill once saying (in *Comics Feature* #57, July 1987) that Kirk Alyn was the best *Superman*, largely because he was more athletic. My sentiments are closer to those of Henderson and makeup man Harry Thomas...I consider Reeves the perfect live action incarnation of the man of Steel. For me, the atmospheric first season represents *The Adventures of Superman* at its zenith. Noel Neill replaced Phyllis Coates in season

two, and several memorable segments were produced that year. Color was introduced in season three, and the plots grew more puerile with each successive season, although some of the later shows exude an innocent charm.

It's amusing to see the guest shots by actors destined for future TV stardom: Russell Johnson, Hugh Beaumont, Billy Gray, Hayden Rorke, Denver Pyle, Chuck Connors and Claude Akins all did *Superman* shows.

Jan Henderson's reporting on the mystery surrounding Reeves' death was compelling. This enigma has been extensively covered in the past, but I've never before seen such a wealth of evidence in one article. Still, I decline to speculate on what happened the night of June 16, 1959. I just don't know - and probably never will.

Sincerely,
Timothy M. Walters
Muskogee, OK

Dear Cult Movies,

Just read the new *Cult Movies* and want to say "Thank You" for the kind words and continued support of my work.

Loved the cover (whatta babel!) and enjoyed the *Superman* coverage as well, although I'm not as interested in that subject as much as some people I know. Movie & Video reviews are still a favorite of mine. The "Roadshow" piece on Claude Alexander was a stand-out. Just the type of thing that separates *Cult Movies* from all its competitors. No skimpy coverage here!

Loretta King - one has to wonder how she's escaped this long. Finally a Wood interview with one of the leads! Interesting & informative.

Finally, I've just finished my first children's movie - don't let the authorities find out! It's called *Invisible Mom* and stars Dee Wallace-Stone, Stella Stevens, Russ Tamblyn, Barry Livingston, Brinke Stevens, and a guest cameo by John Ashley - his first time in front of the cameras in about twenty years.

Keep up the spectacular work!

Sincerely,
Fred Olen Ray
Hollywood, CA

Dear Cult Movies,

It was so good to meet the *Cult Movies* staff at the *Famous Monsters* convention recently. Buddy and Michael are wonderful people, and Conrad Brooks was a real trip! I'm the girl who kept requesting more *Star Trek* material in your mag, and I still do! If the *ST* films aren't cult material, I don't know what is.

I've seen dealers and comic stores selling your George Reeves issue for \$15 a copy, just a month after it was printed. At a giant 120 pages, it's one of the most awesome issues of any fan magazine ever printed. I hope you'll have more articles by Lisa Mitchell and Cathy Orrison; they're among the best writers in fandom. And, don't forget *Star Trek*!

Love,
Debbie Steiner
Portland, OR

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Video Reviews

Addicted to Murder

(1995, Brimstone Pictures, Produced, directed & edited by Kevin Lindenmuth. With Mick McCleery, Laura McLaughlin, Sasha Graham)

Who are you when it's night time in the city and the pain begins? Who feeds your hunger? How can anyone be certain?

Addicted to Murder poses questions but never settles on any answers. This picture could be sub-titled "Sex Fantasies of a Serial Killer." There is a cohesive story told, but it's somehow intrusive to the movie. Here the Nightmare is the thing.

Joel is tormented by Succubus who encourages him to be just like her. But what is she, a vampire? That word is never used in this film. But there are night people with an impassioned need to drink blood, often share and swap each others' blood the way one would share tea, or sexual intercourse, or a good cigarette. During breaks from these midnight fantasies, Joel may be killing lots of women. Doctors and policemen have plenty of theories about him, and compose character studies of this type of killer.

In one exquisite scene, young Joel reclines in bed with Angie, the lady vampire who is his teacher, tormenter, lust partner. Both of them are drenched in blood. A half-eaten corpse is in bed with them. Joel is in a sultry, contemplative mood and Angie asks what he's thinking about. He tells her, "My past, and all the things that have happened to me. Everything's becoming different. It scares me because I never thought about what it would be like to die. I've killed before, but never analyzed it."

Angie tries to set him straight: "I'm not asking you to analyze anything. You're just becoming one of us — a hunter! You'll know what it is to hunt, to be loved by the moon and the shadows. Your pain and bitterness won't hurt you anymore. You won't be haunted by old ghosts."

With that, her hand gracefully drifts out to peel another bloody piece of flesh from the old corpse and bring it to her black lips. Some couples only eat pretzels in bed.

With erotic, neurotic night world fantasies like this to live in, who needs reality barging in? The picture builds to a conclusion filled with ghoulish make-up. The visual and audio effects are all excellent, and the acting is right in tune with the nature of the subject. The project was shot and edited on Betacam SP with broadcast camera equipment and then "Filmlooked."

Reviewed by Michael Copner

Burlesque, the Way It Was, 1946

Moviefcraft has a real nostalgia trip with their compilation of theatrical shorts filmed for the Burle-Q houses in the 1940s. These are to the grind houses what telecriptions were to early television; short bits of variety, though of a spicy and specialized nature. In this burlesque review you'll see such exciting dancers as Patty Long, The Pacific Pin-Up Girl. As an audience of one you'll witness how she and her strip tease sisters wowed 'em. Also, you'll chortle and guffaw to vaudeville comics Little Jack Little and Don Mathers.

This is part of the "Magic Memories" series which includes lost TV shows, rare cartoons, war newsreels, feature films, and much more. To find out more, you can send \$1.00 for their catalog of unusual videos; Moviefcraft, PO Box 438, Orlando Park, FL 60462.

Sadomania

(Dir: Jess Franco, W. German/Spanish co-production, 1980, 87 min.)

Everything that a women-in-prison film should be is abundant in the first 15 minutes. We see naked women kept in tiny cages; sweaty, nearly naked women made to turn the soil under the boiling hot sun; and lusty, sex starved women paired up in enforced-lesbian confinement. The promise of the first reel is never entirely kept, and the film shifts gears to become a capture-and-run action flick, nevertheless filled with beautiful sex-slaves who never get a chance to put many clothes on, indoors or out.

The loveliest and lustiest prison warden ever to burn up the silver screen is portrayed by the late Ajita Wilson, a real-life transsexual who died in Rome in 1987 from a brain hemorrhage. Jess Franco is seen in a brief cameo appearance as the gay keeper of a whorehouse where women are sold into slavery. Lina Romay was Franco's assistant director on this film.

Available on VHS via Threat Theatre, Olympia, WA.

Reviewed by Colette Olson

American Gothic

(1988) Dir. by John Hough. An intriguing premise, ripe with possibilities, is mishandled in this poorly scripted, poorly acted, dark entry of the slasher/crazed family variety. Academy Award® winner Rod Steiger is the husband of Yvonne DeCarlo (Lillian Munster herself) and the puritanical head of a reclusive, looney family living alone on an island in the Pacific Northwest. Along comes half a dozen unlikely yuppies, including the main protagonist who is recovering from an emotional breakdown due to the death of her baby in a bathtub, and it's time for a little splatter fun and games.

Rather than concentrating on the potentially interesting characters and warped dynamics of the sick, homicidal family, screenwriters Burt Wetanson and Michael Vines and director John Hough decide to make just another stalk and slash movie. Ma, Pa, Teddy, Woody, and Fanny, as the dark travesty of the American god-fearing family, are all fascinating characters, but they're left largely unexplored. The yuppie protagonists are all so shallow and unlikeable that no empathy is generated and therefore no real suspense or interest arises. Steiger and DeCarlo play their characters rather broadly, which is fine at first but soon grows tiresome as you long for a more subtle approach to bring things down to earth again.

A few gruesome murders, an occasional disturbing sequence involving the family members, and a lot of running around in the woods is about all *American Gothic* has to offer.

Reviewed by Bryan Senn

The Blancheville Monster

(1964; Film Columbus/Llama Films) Producer: Alberto Aguilera. Director: Alberto de Martino. Screenwriters: Bruno Corbucci, Giovanni Grimaldi, Natividad Zaro.

Deservedly obscure Italian/Spanish import about the cursed house of deBlancheville. There's a father hidden away in a crumbling tower who's been horribly disfigured in a fire, a sinister doctor lurking about the estate exchanging pointed glances with the dubious house-

keeper, a murderous brother, and a sister who ends up buried alive. The plot is convoluted, the acting melodramatic, and whatever supposed 'surprise' twists and turns the story supplies are easily guessed half way through the film.

On the plus side there are some wonderfully eerie sets, filled with towering walls of stone and deep shadows, and sinister, shadowy woodlands straight out of a Gothic novel. But nothing truly interesting ever happens in these magnificent horror settings. And worst of all, there really is no "Blancheville Monster."

Reviewed by Bryan Senn.

Children Shouldn't Play With Dead Things

(1973; Geneni Productions) Producers: Benjamin (Bob) Clark, Gary Goch. Director: Bob Clark. Screenwriters: Bob Clark, Alan Ormsby. Cinematographer: Jack McGowan. With Alan Ormsby, Jeffrey Gillen, Paul Cronin, Roy Engleman, Bob Filep, Bruce Solomon, Alecs Baird, Seth Sklarey.

Children Shouldn't Play With Dead Things is really two films in one; or, more precisely, one film with two different tempos. The first half is black comedy (which sometimes works and sometimes doesn't).

A theater group, headed by Alan Ormsby (who also co-wrote the screen play as well as creating the effective makeup!), visits a graveyard located on a remote island. Why they visit this creepy place in the middle of the night is anybody's guess, except that the megalomaniac director (Ormsby) wants to play wizard with a satanic tome he's uncovered. He intends to cast a spell to raise the dead (or at least have a few laughs in the meantime). This first half, consisting of a lot of bad wisecracks (usually centered around a corpse these jokers have dug up and nicknamed 'Orville') and a few good ones comes to a close when the spell is finally cast.

Excellent camera work and some (uncharacteristically) intense acting at this point make this bizarre scene a riveting set-piece and an excellent jumping-off point for the film's no-holds-barred second half. For you see, the spell really works and the dead actually do rise in an incredible scene inspired by George Romero's *Night of the Living Dead* (and inspiration for Michael Jackson's *Thriller*). At this point the movie becomes as gripping and as terrifying as Romero's classic. Unfortunately, *Children* is marred by the generally substandard acting (Ormsby should remain behind the camera) of the cast (made up of many of director Bob Clark's college friends). Also, the hit-and-miss comedy of the sometimes slow-moving first half is only partially effective. But stay tuned, for the second half is well worth the wait.

Alan Ormsby went on to direct the disturbing 1974 film *Deranged* and wrote *Cat People* (1982). Director Clark's *Deathdream* (1972) is even better than *Children*; both are low-budget classics of the drought-ridden seventies. *Children Shouldn't Play With Dead Things* was shot in 14 days on a miniscule budget of \$70,000 — an impressive achievement.

Reviewed by Bryan Senn

The Crater Lake Monster (1977)

"Hell, if things were different they'd be easier." This absurd observation from a cast member of *The Crater Lake Monster* sets the tone for this awful Loch Ness Monster variation. The only recommendation for viewing *The Crater Lake Monster* is the surprisingly good stop-motion animation of the title character created by animator Dave Allen (*Equinox*, 1971; *Flesh Gordon*, 1972; the recent *Puppetmaster* series).

A meteor crashes into Oregon's Crater Lake and heats up the water just enough to hatch a dormant dinosaur egg lying on the bottom. So

out comes a hungry pleseasaurus who commences to chow down on the locals, which is no great loss since by and large they all act like imbecilic yokels anyway.

The script is bad, the acting worse, and the finale, when the hero sheriff takes on the house-sized thunderlizard with a snowplow, is ludicrous. Funds must have been running short, since so does this unexciting climactic battle. The sheriff obviously knew just where to find a pleseasaur's weak spot, because he merely runs into the towering monster's midriff with the front of the snowplow and miraculously kills the beast. Stop-motion fans will get a kick out of the proceedings but everybody else will just kick themselves for sitting through it.

Reviewed by Bryan Senn

Destination Inner Space



(United Pictures Corp., 1966) With Scott Brady, Sheree North, Gary Merrill.

"Borrowing" pages from many previous science fiction scripts, *Destination Inner Space* takes place in a scientific research station on the ocean floor, although it could just as easily have been set in the Arctic like *The Thing* or in outer space like *It! The Terror from Beyond Space* (to name the two movies *Destination* most conspicuously copies). Scott Brady is a Navy commander dispatched to the submerged "Aquashpere" after an unidentified object is detected by the subsea researchers' equipment. The mysterious intruder is a "flying" (floating?) saucer which "buzzes the installation and then settles on the ocean bottom nearby. Exploring the uninhabited craft (a remotely controlled probe ship), Brady and divers Mike Road and Wende Wagner discover a cylindrical tank which is brought back to the Aquashpere over Brady's objections. The tank "hatches" into a rampaging sea monster with a perpetually frowning face, sharp teeth and claws and an attractive bright red dorsal fin. The monster (Ron Burke) cuts off the Aquashpere's supply of oxygen (provided by a ship topside) and menaces the oceanauts.

Cheap-looking and slow-paced, *Destination Inner Space* was a depressingly appropriate kick-off to Scott Brady's subpar SF/horror career (*Castle of Evil*, *Journey to the Center of Time*, *The Mighty Gorga*, etc.). Arthur C. Pierce's script checks off all the tried-and-true plot devices of space-monster-on-the-loose thrillers, apparently hoping that the deep sea setting will disguise his re-use of the well-worn formula. *The Thing* is well-represented with Brady standing in for Ken Tobey as a no-nonsense military type summoned to a remote outpost of civilian scientists plagued by a "UFO;" Sheree North (as a marine biologist) is the Margaret Sheridan equivalent; Gary Merrill, importuning that the dangerous amphibian not be harmed, endangers the group as did *The Thing*'s Robert Cornthwaite; the cagey amphibian cuts off the humans' oxygen supply

the way the Thing shuts off the Arctic scientists' heat. (Monster actor Burke is even billed as "The Thing.") As in *It! The Terror*, there's character conflict between Brady and Road (in *It!*, Marshall Thompson and Kim Spalding sparred) and a disease-carrying monster whose merest scratch lands its victims in sick bay; Road sacrifices himself to destroy the monster just as Spalding did in *It!* Paul Dunlap's music, much of it taken from his earlier *I Was a Teenage Werewolf* and *Invisible Invaders*, also adds to the sense of *deja vu*.

Brady plays the "submariner" with his customary seriousness, overruling the science-happy civilians in all matters of importance, and climactically clinches with North after a great deal of coy verbal jousting. Vets like John Howard (as a medical officer), Biff Elliot (an electronics expert) and Roy Barcroft (the skipper of the topside ship) add a bit of pizzazz to an otherwise forgettable supporting cast. The monster outfit was created by Richard Cassarino, who also made the *Hideous Sun Demon* get-up (and played the cop who killed him). *Variety's* Dool raved about the movie with jaw-dropping naivete, assuming that the actors did their own scuba diving and citing the screenwriter's "intense research of oceanography." Does anyone out there happen to know if Arthur C. Pierce reviewed movies for *Variety*?

Reviewed by Tom Weaver

Mutiny in Outer Space (Allied Artists, 1965)

With William Leslie, Dolores Faith

As long as we're kicking the hell out of Arthur C. Pierce, let's do a thorough job of it and talk about *Mutiny in Outer Space*, too: Typical of the writer, this 1965 release is also cheaply cobbled together out of spare parts and additional leavings from better science fiction movies past. *Mutiny* combines story elements from *Space Master X-7*, *The Blob* and other '50s favorites, with musical cues from *Creature from the Black Lagoon*, *World Without End* and even *The Ghost of Frankenstein* (!) contributing to the feeling of familiarity. In the 1990s, ice caves on the Moon are explored by astronauts William Leslie and Carl Crow, who take various lunar samples to the orbiting wheel-shaped Space Station X-7 (under the command of Richard Garland). Alling Crow is diagnosed with "space raptures," but the actual cause is a spot of fungus on his leg which rapidly grows in size and ravages his dead body. Giant "tentacles" of fungus (actually Spanish moss) now terrorize members of the crew but haggard, careworn Garland, suffering the effects of prolonged weightlessness, ignores the danger, hallucinates, becomes dangerous and leads crew members on a merry chase before he is subdued. Meanwhile, the fungus (a forgotten plot component!) fills the ship inside and out while, back on Earth, a montage of spinning newspapers (with foreign names and English headlines) publicizes the spacemen's peril.

Mutiny in Outer Space was the premiere production of Hugo Grimaldi Film Productions, formed by Grimaldi and Pierce with the intention of producing a series of science fiction features. Initially called *Space Station X* and later *Invasion from the Moon*, it rolled at Producers Studio on March 18, 1964; during production, executive producers Lawrence and Bernard Woolner (in association with Grimaldi) announced immediate plans for a series of 15-20 SF/horror films with *The Human Duplicators* slated to roll next, followed by *Frozen Continent*, *The Amphibians* and *5 Billion Years*. These long-range plans were nipped practically in the bud, perhaps as a result of the poor quality of (and, possibly, poor audience response to) *Mutiny in Outer Space*, which in addition to its mishmash story suffered from shoddy black-and-white production and substandard special effects. The film

was knocked out on a six-day shooting schedule; miniatures (including the space station, engulfed in steel wool "fungus") were shot in a day on the Howard A. Anderson Co. process stage. According to Pierce (in a *Magick Theater* interview with Kevin Robert Danzey), it was he and not the screen-credited Grimaldi who actually directed the movie.

Arthur C. Pierce is no one's favorite sci-fi writer, but he'd have a slightly better reputation if he tried harder to camouflage the fact that just about every plot component in his movies is stolen. Inexplicably spotlighting *Mutiny in Outer Space*'s indebtedness to *Space Master X-7*, Pierce brazenly names his space station X-7 as well. Among other "lifts" from *The Blob*, Pierce uses intense cold to destroy the space fungus; he even has one of the film's Earthbound characters (Glenn Langan) wield a fire extinguisher in a wholly unnecessary (and messy!) demonstration.

Perhaps to hide the seaminess of the space-ship sets (or perhaps just to keep the electric bill low!), scenes aboard the X-7 are shot in gloomy darkness, adding to the film's unmistakable look of cheapness. Poking around in the dark amidst the other members of the cast, Richard Garland gives a good performance as the stressed-out space skipper: spouting the technical dialogue, taking every setback to heart, ignoring the imprecations of ship's doctor James Dobson and finally succumbing to spells of Captain Queeg-like paranoia. Others in the overworked, presumably underpaid cast include Dolores Faith, Pamela Curran, Harold Lloyd, Jr., and Francine York.

Reviewed by Tom Weaver

The Doors (1991)

Written and directed by Oliver Stone; stars Val Kilmer as Jim Morrison; in color, available on videocassette and laserdisc (letterboxed format).

If 1960s "chronicler" Oliver Stone accomplished anything at all with this movie, it was to capture the look and feel of that decade to cool and acid-tinged perfection. As a vision of the frenetic '60s West Coast scene, it comes across. As biography, it fails both miserably and uselessly. In spite of Val Kilmer's skillfully incisive mime of Jim Morrison, the erratic rock poet emerges little more than a psychotic drunk, more of a lunatic than he ever was. In Oliver Stone's version of pop history, you rarely (if ever) see the real Jim, whose life was interesting and quirky enough that it didn't have to be dolled up with fictitious innuendoes. Also, Ollie, he wasn't all dark!

The music, for the most part, is great, but all you really get are teases — just enough of them to make you wish a soundtrack of Kilmer doing Morrison had been released (obviously, the "actual" Doors would have something to say about this, yet it's a diverting idea all the same).

In a scene wherein the Doors first meet the press, Pam Courson (Meg Ryan) introduces herself giddily as an "ornament," and that's about all her role comes down to in this picture. Kathleen Quinlan's supremely bitchy Patricia Kennealy doesn't fare much better. The other Doors (Kevin Dillon, Kyle MacLachlan and Frank Whaley) are almost realistic, what little we know of them.

Some of the best roles in this flick are virtual cameos. Crispin Glover's Andy Warhol is a loon, about what you'd expect of Glover/Warhol, while Will Jordan's Ed Sullivan is a mirror-perfect caricature. The babes lining the movie are knock-outs, Kristina Fulton's Nico looking hotter than Nico ever looked.

If you're a late-blooming Doors fan, see the movie and have fun picking it to pieces. Then

(continued)

rent the Doors videos *Dance On Fire* and *Live In Europe*, shows proving that truth is sometimes better than fiction.

Oliver Stone should have learned that lesson.

Reviewed by Spider Subke

Five

(1951, Columbia) Producer/Director/Screenwriter: Arch Obler. With William Phipps, Susan Douglas, James Anderson, Charles Lampkin, Earl Lee.

The very first End-of-the-World-by-Nuclear-Holocaust movie, *Five* is a stark, personal look at "survival" after the bomb. Made only six years after the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, *Five* points out the horror of nuclear devastation, not through shots of twisted wreckage and mangled bodies (the low budget couldn't support such expensive effects), but through the more personal terror of individual loneliness and isolation.

The film focuses on first one, then two, then four, and finally five survivors who find each other after the devastation. Through the interesting and diverse characters and their relationships, the film explores both the best and the worst in human nature. The landscapes are bleak and the stark black-and-white photography creates an almost palpably oppressive atmosphere. Yet, in the end, there is still hope for the human race when all is said and done.

The small cast lacks 'names,' but each actor does quite well with the often difficult roles they play. The pacing is sometimes too slow and the production suffers from a lack of scope (budget again). Despite these liabilities, *Five* still remains a thought-provoking, serious look at what-we-must-never-let-happen.

Reviewed by Bryan Senn

The Deadly Mantis (1957)

"In all the kingdom of the living there is no more deadly or voracious creature than the Praying Mantis." *The Deadly Mantis* begins with a lengthy sequence of cold-war paranoia stock footage showing the military "racing against time to guard against sneak attack" by creating a radar defense network in the Arctic. This segues right into an impromptu lecture on the fact that "every action has an equal and opposite reaction," leading us to believe that nuclear testing has melted a particularly large chunk of ice. The iceberg disgorges *The Deadly Mantis* to fly about attacking planes, ships, and Eskimo villages until being gassed in the Lincoln tunnel. In a nutshell: Big bug appears, flies around, eats a few people, has the entire Air Force out trying to find it, and finally lands in a major city where it's cornered and killed. The end. There's a human element in there somewhere, but it's not very interesting and even less memorable than usual in a big bug film.

The homo sapien characters consist of a young army colonel (representing the might of the military), a youthful paleontologist (the science angle), and a pretty woman photographer (the love interest). Unfortunately, these people don't do anything interesting and the obvious possibilities for a love triangle are never explored. There is absolutely no human conflict, so all the drama rests on the shoulders — or mandibles? — of one overgrown bug. Admittedly, said insect is fairly impressive in appearance, and is photographed against some excellent models with up-angle camera work emphasizing its impossible size. However, the mantis moves a bit too slowly to convince us it's all that 'deadly' and makes a rather annoying bellowing noise when it attacks, like an insect version of a stuck pig.

There's one particularly memorable scene when the giant mantis descends on Washington D.C. and has the audacity to crawl up the Wash-

ington Monument. It looks quite impressive as it moves straight up the huge obelisk and we're treated to a frightening view from inside the monument through an observation window. Its huge abdomen passing across our field of vision, looking alien and monstrous as it moves up the side, is something no bug lover will soon forget. The mantis also does a nice bit of car tossing at the climactic confrontation in the tunnel, throwing the realistic-looking automobiles aside as if they were Matchbox toys. But alas, the climax is a let down. The mantis' final death throes, as the poison gas chokes the very life out of its gargantuan body, are decidedly unexciting. It simply sinks to the ground and collapses, without any threatening thrashing or furious fanfare. Stay tuned for that one last "gotcha" however, as the presumed dead mantis raises its claw one last time to menace the heroine (and 'bug' the audience).

As Big Bugs go, *The Deadly Mantis* is better than some (*Beginning of the End*, 1957; *The Monster From Green Hell*, 1958) but far from the best (*Them!*, 1954; *Tarantula*, 1955).

Reviewed by Bryan Senn

Mysterious Island (Columbia serial, 1951)

With Richard Crane, Karen Randle

Richard Crane, who played supporting roles in many 20th Century-Fox features of the 1940s, dashed all hope of ever returning to A pictures by appearing in that lowest of all cinematic "art forms," the Sam Katzman serial. The first of his two chapterplays for "Jungle Sam" was 1951's *Mysterious Island* — or, as the full title is seen on-screen, *Jules Verne's Mysterious Island — Captain Harding's Fabulous Adventures*. Chapter 1 ("Lost in Space") is set during the Civil War with that "brilliant officer of the engineers," Union Captain Cyrus Harding (Crane), being sighted from a Confederate observation balloon, captured and subjected to a comically cordial and informal "incarceration" in Richmond (where he's free to walk the streets). He and four other men (Marshall Reed, Ralph Hodges, Hugh Prosser, Bernard Hamilton) escape in the balloon, but a hurricane overtakes them and for five days carries them southwest. Touching ground again on the Mysterious Island, Crane and friends are bedeviled by Polynesian-looking Volcano People, a wild savage (Terry Frost), pirates and even a pretty alien invader in short shorts (Karen Randle) with plans for world conquest or destruction (she never makes up her mind).

Mysterious Island starts off on the wrong foot (the Civil War stock footage in Chapter 1 is in fast motion and has a patina of antiquity) and never gets in step; even children had to be bored by the phony fisticuffs, back-and-forth foot-chases and endless gunfights in which no one bothers to stay behind cover and yet no one is ever hit. The Verne novel's most famous character, Captain Nemo (Leonard Penn), wears an all-concealing outer space-like outfit throughout most of the chapterplay, but finally doffs it and introduces himself to our heroes in the closing reels. (In addition to dressing like an alien, he speaks as though he came from the future: Referring to Randle, he says, "She came here in search of a mineral the world will someday call uranium.") Surprisingly, the Lewis Clay-Royal K. Cole-George H. Plympton screenplay retains all of the novel's main characters; in fact, except for the lady from space (a concession to the then-current SF vogue), the serial is closer to the novel than the more famous 1961 feature version, which was primarily a showcase for extraneous-to-the-story Ray Harryhausen-animated menaces.

Reviewed by Tom Weaver

It Came From Outer Space (1953)

Directed by Jack Arnold; screenplay by Harry Essex, based on a treatment by Ray Bradbury; stars Richard Carlson, Barbara Rush, Charles Drake, Joe Sawyer, Russell Johnson, Kathleen Hughes; available on MCA Videocassette.

This was Universal's entry into the 3-D market, but it works just as well in 2-D, which is what you're getting here. This latest MCA package includes the original theatrical trailer and there's a bonus you won't find advertised on the colorful packaging for this edition — the original stereo soundtrack. Yep, it's there for all you fanatics who really want it!

When Jack Arnold made this flick for Universal, they said "Give Us Monsters! Give Us Monsters!" So, he gave 'em what they wanted, he gave 'em some ugly monsters that happened to be good guys, then he went and made us the bad guys. They didn't seem to mind because that's how it was released. In between shots of Barbara Rush screaming her damn fool head off every 10 minutes or so, we learn that these aliens have been "possessing" townspeople in order to move about freely so they can repair their crashed ship and get the hell out of Dodge. Richard Carlson, an idealistic astronomy freak, agrees to help them, getting the town sheriff and the rest of the rednecks on his case. Just as the proverbial you-know-what is hitting the fan, the aliens finish their repairs and take off for parts unknown.

This movie works as intelligent SF because, even though there's a little bit of inane dialog here and there, it has an absolutely positive attitude about its subject matter and about the future. There "monstrous" big-eyed xenomorphs are a far cry from the folks next door but you like them, you want to get to know them, which is more than many of us can say about the "folks next door." These aliens talk nice (if a little bland) and they make neat-looking spaceships. It comes as no surprise that Steven Spielberg liked this flick as a rugrat. I did too. Admit it, so did you.

Reviewed by Spider Subke

Earth vs. The Flying Saucers (1956)

"When an armed and threatening powers lands uninvited in our capitol we don't meet them with tea and cookie," exclaims a determined army Major in *Earth vs. The Flying Saucers*, the ultimate "flying saucer" movie.

Earth is a marvel of special effects and a tribute to the genius of animator Ray Harryhausen. See flying saucers destroy a battleship. See flying saucers over the capitol of the world, gliding past the Eiffel Tower, the London Parliament, and the White House. See an out-of-control saucer smash into the Washington Monument, sending it crashing to the ground. See the dome of our capitol building crushed beneath a crashing saucer. These are just a few of the highlights provided by Ray Harryhausen as he sends his stop-motion animated saucers out to wreak havoc. His creations, although inanimate objects, seem almost alive as they flit about the sky, darting this way and that with incredible speed, or gliding gracefully yet malevolently over our cityscapes. Harryhausen flawlessly integrates his unstoppable saucers into some excellent stock footage of exploding buildings, ships, and planes. When watching, there is no question that those fighter jets were just shot down by a time when the army was always right and authority was rarely questioned.

The film has its flaws though, not the least of which is a simplistic and often contrived plot. Dr. Marvin whips up a totally new superweapon with which to combat the invaders a bit too easily. The aliens stupidly (and too conveniently) decide to send all of their saucers to Washington D.C. to attack, even knowing about our 'su-

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perweapon' and making no provision against it. The dialogue gets awfully technical at times: "You can take it from me, when a rocket blasts off it should circle the Earth for a long time." And the film as a whole often reflects the hostile paranoia permeating the 1950s. When the saucers first appear it is our side which fires first, unprovoked. And no one questions this callous and ignorant act of brutality. But we're not here to pick apart the film's cold-war messages, we're here to see flying saucers destroy Washington D.C. We're here to see humanity triumph and repel the alien invaders. And we do, in a spectacular way which is unsurpassed in the cinema of its decade.

Reviewed by Bryan Senn

Steckler Collection:

Deadlocked

Hollywood Strangler Meet The Skid Row Slasher

Hollywood Strangler In Las Vegas

Incredibly Strange filmmaker Ray Dennis Steckler has recut and re-released all of his past efforts in new B&W video versions and feels they now come closer to his original conception of each movie. *Deadlocked* is Steckler's 1969 shot at a pulp fiction private eye movie, previously titled *Supercool*, then *Body Fever*. Steckler is good in the lead role of Charlie Smith, a Bogart-admiring LA detective so poor, he hitchhikes and walks to various locations while on the trail of catwoman burglar Carrie Erskine (Carolyn Brandt), who's stolen heroin from a bunch of slimy dope peddlers.

Steckler does give this new version more of a moody paperback novel feel to the gritty proceedings by de-colorizing the original movie, but not the classic "film noir" look, that expressionistic interplay of light and shadow that can only be achieved by lighting scenes specifically for B&W film and setting a crime story mainly at night, as they did in the '40s and '50s.

Unlike his earlier psychomaniac roles, Steckler portrays his first and last hero type who gets to make time with some attractive actresses: Brett Zeller, Julie Connors and Carolyn Brandt at her slinkiest and sexiest. One of the cuts eliminates an introductory scene of Charlie with his secretary which reveals the character's money problems. Bernard Fein, a producer of the TV show *Hogan's Heroes*, is excellent as pug-mug-gangster Big Mac and Herb Robins has a nice turn as a twitchy killer. The late Ron Haydock, horror movie magazine and adult paperback writer ("Vin Saxon"), has a bit as a girlie photographer and Coleman Francis (*Beast of Yucca Flats*, Russ Meyer's *Motorpsycho*) plays Smith's friend.

Also de-colorized for a '50s pulp-grit look, *The Hollywood Strangler Meets The Skid Row Slasher* was originally shot without sound in 16mm color in the squalid neighborhoods of LA and Las Vegas. The Strangler's (Pierre Agostini) and the Slasher's (Carolyn Brandt) murders, which originally had the super-lurid, ultra-sleazy look of the covers of such newsstand magazines as *True Detective*, have now been altered as well as defused by video slo-mo and freeze frame effects. The striking Brandt is pretty weird looking, with or without color, in her first and only malignant role, and last Steckler movie.

Similarly revised is Steckler's later follow-up, *The Hollywood Strangler In Las Vegas*. Released a bit early from prison, The Strangler (who now has a name, Johnathan Click, Steckler's Mad Dog Click moniker from his '65 pic *The Thrill Killers*) moves to Vegas, gets a job as a pizza deliverer, the favored occupations of most serial sex killers, and resumes his choking of any woman he can get his hands on. Vegas is a town made for color; the B&W gives it a downbeat atmosphere, Steckler's intent. Strangler/fake photographer Agostini continually crosses paths

with two stupid street thugs, possibly the most jerked-up crime duo in weird movie history, which kinda swings this entry into a comedy of sorts. A third *Strangler* epic was partly filmed, then shelved. Guess the world wasn't ready. All three movies are available in any version from Mascot Video and Sinister Cinema, and the original nifty music soundtracks by Henri Price are retained throughout.

Reviewed by James Elliot Singer

The Premature Burial

(AIP, 1962) With Ray Milland, Hazel Court. From Orion Home Video

Now available letter-boxed on laser disc, *The Premature Burial* was an independent (non-AIP) attempt by Roger Corman and Pathe Laboratories to cut into the profitable Edgar Allan pie. Unfortunately for Corman, the success of his AIP features *House of Usher* and *Pit and the Pendulum* had already given other moviemakers (and TV producers) the same idea, and *Premature Burial* was a story very much in demand that year. Even as Corman prepared for his third Poe (which he initially announced would be shot at British-Lion Studios in London), NBC's *Thriller* series began shooting a Boris Karloff-starring



version at Revue on August 9, 1961 (aired 10/2/61) while the Woolner Brothers laid plans to make their own film version, in color and CinemaScope, from a Mark Hanna screenplay. (The Woolners negotiated to line up Marshall Thompson and Mala Powers, stars of their earlier *Flight of the Lost Balloon*, for the top spots.) Since Corman had a dead start on the project, Bernard Woolner bowed out in favor of Corman, who in turn reimbursed the Woolners for their investment in the story.

Corman's *Premature Burial* got underway at Producers Studio one day before Halloween (October 30, 1961) with Ray Milland, not traditional series star Vincent Price, in the top slot. Milland took a salary and a percentage for his role as Guy Carrell, a medical experimenter in 1860s England with a fear of being buried alive. Milland's phobia has caused him to turn from his beautiful girlfriend Hazel Court, but the strong-minded girl persists and later marries Milland (during a deafening, "Heaven-protests" thunderstorm, and under the doleful, disapproving eye of Milland's sister Heather Angel). Milland is soon consumed by his fears again and erects for his eventual use an above-ground mausoleum complete with a succession of Rube Goldberg-esque escape contraptions. When Court threatens the reclusive Milland with divorce, he symbolically dynamites the tomb; to

cure him once and for all, a decision is made to open Milland's father's basement crypt, to prove to Milland that his forebear was not prematurely entombed (as Milland has always maintained). But hideous evidence to the contrary brings on a cataleptic spell in Milland, and true to his worst fears the paralyzed man is buried beneath the ground.

Sometimes regarded as a sort of poor cousin to the Poe series because of the absence of Price, *Premature Burial* is a solid entry nicely enhanced by Ray Milland's performance. (*The New York Times* felt the same way, citing Milland's "nervous restraint" as an improvement over "Price's eye-rolling" in *Pit and the Pendulum*.) Charles Beaumont and Ray Russell also do a commendable job in supplanting regular Poe screenwriter Richard Matheson; the new scripters capture the flavor of the earlier Corman Poes, but *Burial* has a bit more of an "edge," along with a record number of Lewton-style "busses," some of which fall while others are remarkably effective. (Corman had a bit of a "bus" of his own the day AIP bigwigs Jim Nicholson and Sam Arkoff showed up on the set and smilingly informed him that they had compelled Pathe Laboratories to turn the movie over to AIP!) The Beaumont-Russell script also has the advantage of well-spaced highlights, beginning with the pre-credits sequence (graverobbers open the coffin of a buried-alive man) and moving on through the tour of the getaway-rigged mausoleum, a dream sequence in which Milland imagines that all its escape devices fail, the "haunting" of Milland by the whistling graverobbers (John Dierkes and Dick Miller) and Milland's climactic rise from the grave. Also effective is Milland's burial scene, with Milland helplessly watching his interment from inside his windowed coffin a la *Vampyr* and *The Crime of Doctor Crespi*.

Court falls into the pattern of treacherous Poe women (begun by Barbara Steele in *Pit and the Pendulum*). Tiring of Milland's neuroses, it is she who is finally revealed as the author of his misery, hiring Dierkes and Miller to stalk him and taking his father's corpse out of its tomb. But she is unwittingly undone by her own doctor-father (Alan Napier, superbly playing with a subtle, smirking suggestion of depravity). Napier heartlessly hires Dierkes and Miller to dig up Milland for his own experimental purposes—freeing a now-mad, slightly satanic looking fiend who chokes Dierkes, skewers Miller with a crowbar, electrocutes Napier and unceremoniously dumps the bound, screaming Court into his own defiled grave.

Premature Burial wrapped on November 24, 1961, and went into release in '62. Critics complained about the story and the sets; *Variety's* Anby sniped, "By this time, many film fans (and at least one reviewer) are as familiar with Corman's downstairs dungeons as they are with their own basement hobbyshops." But audiences disagreed, soaking up the atmosphere of ornate gloom. By June *Premature Burial* had grossed more than \$1,250,000 in the domestic market and was well on its way to becoming one of AIP's all-time top-grossers. It's not in the league of *House of Usher* or *Pit and the Pendulum*, but—partly due to the absence of the overused Price—it's arguably one of the Poe series' best.

Reviewed by Tom Weaver

The Flying Serpent

(1946; PRC) PRC stands for Producers Releasing Corporation, but actually means 'Poverty Row Cinema,' and the meaning is all too evident in *The Flying Serpent*.

Looking overly familiar (the plot is essentially the same as PRC's earlier (and better) film *The Devil Bat* (1941), the story concerns an archeology professor (George Zucco) who has found the

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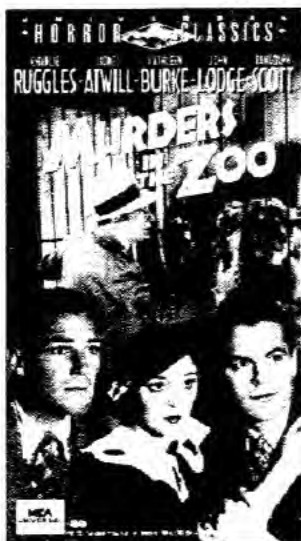
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fabled treasure of Montezuma and, along with it, the prehistoric bird/monster the ancient Aztec's called Quetzalcoatl. Zucco sends this creature (described as half-bird and half-reptile) out to kill whoever gets too close to the treasure, or basically whoever annoys him. He simply places one of the monster's feathers on the victim and the Flying Serpent swoops down and rips their throat out.

At least it is supposed to swoop down; what it actually does is glide slowing down on (visible) wires, there to be grabbed and held by the victim who thrashes about trying to make it appear that Quetzalcoatl is ripping his throat out. The creature is only about four feet in length and so unconvincing with its leathery wings and raggedy-looking stuffed body that it's difficult not to laugh as a character meets his 'death' at the beak of this ferocious flying fiend. Terribly bad model work showing the mountain temple in long shot doesn't add any believability either. But these silly props are not the main fault of the film, for they can become almost charming in their campy ineptness, and they are what makes the film memorable (for all the wrong reasons, of course, but memorable nonetheless).

The worst aspect of this little film is the unforgivably stupid storyline. It starts out fine, with Zucco sending his feathered monster out to silence those meddlers interfering with his work. But soon the plot silliness sets in as a radio mystery show host goes down to the scene of the murders and sets about solving the crimes on his radio program, the local law giving him their blessing! Now come on, a flying serpent is one thing, but a local sheriff allowing a civilian to head a multiple murder investigation is quite another! Credulity can only stretch just so far!

Even worse than their unbelievability, the numerous scenes involving the radio host/hero

are dull, dull, dull, as he slowly and tediously discovers what the audience already knows. Anyway, things progress on their inexorable course until the final expected bit of movie justice. *The Flying Serpent* does have one asset among its many deficits and that is the presence of the talented character actor and frequent villain, George Zucco. Though given very little to work with, he manages to bring a cultured menace to his thankless role of monster-keeper which rises above the banality and indifference of the others players. And the title creature is fun to watch as it glides about on its studio wires carrying out Montezuma's Revenge.

Reviewed by Bryan Senn

Dr. Strange (1978)

Written & directed by Philip DeGuere; color TV movie stars Peter Hooten, Jessica Walter, Clyde Kusatsu, John Mills, Eddie Benton; available on MCA Videocassette.

Originally one of the Marvel Comics Superheroes, *Dr. Strange* isn't a bad flick as TV movies went in the '70s — or the '80s or the '90s. It works as a thriller in the horror/fantasy mold, thanks largely to some nice SFX, most notably the effect of the "Old One" with his glacial, thundering voice, and also thanks to some very clever casting.

Jessica Walter is Morgan LeFay, a downright nasty villainess who plots with the "Old One" to secure a foothold of evil in this world. For serving him, she gets to keep her youth and beauty along with Dr. Strange. She's instrumental in nailing Strange's teacher (John Mills), a powerful sorcerer who happened to be the Old One's 10-aspirin headache.

Peter Hooten, as Dr. Strange, was adequate for his role and disappeared quietly after this

movie. As his damsel in distress, Eddie Benton was also adequate but mainly decorative. John Mills added dignity and class as the mystic guardian of Earth's safety, sworn to keep the evil ones from crossing over. Jessica Walter grabs this one nicely, just as she did *Play Misty For Me*.

The movie's writer/director Philip DeGuere later helmed the very underrated new *Twilight Zone* series and Dr. Strange was a decent training ground for that.

Reviewed by Spider Subke

White Zombie

Most readers of *Cult Movies* are already familiar with *White Zombie*, the film that many Lugosi aficionados believe contains his finest characterization, as "Murder Legendre." Many of you may already own one of the earlier versions on tape, and your question would be, "Is this disc good enough to justify spending an additional \$39.95, or should I stick with my VHS (or Beta) version?"

The recent release of the Roan Group laser disc restoration of the film provides a reason to reexamine several version of the film in some detail.

I had never seen *White Zombie* before this year, but I had managed to acquire two earlier versions of the film, the one put out by Foothill Video in Tujunga, California, and one from Sinner Cinema, Greg Luce's company, operating out of Medford, Oregon, both ordered at the end of 1994.


I have appreciated Foothill Video for its ability to supply Lugosi films not generally available elsewhere (ask for Ernie Martinkovic) and at a price (\$7.98 each or \$75.00 for ten films) which cannot be matched. But, the downside of

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this is that the films are of wildly varying quality, and their version of *White Zombie*, was a prime example of this. It proved, upon viewing to be rather murky and blurred and I would judge that it was at least a second generation print. The sound was murky as well, and there were numerous glitches in the sound track.

Being only sixty-two (62) minutes long (about five [5] minutes shorter than the other versions), it was obvious that it was missing some major sections of the movie. The scene where Silver tells Beaumont that the young couple and Bruner had arrived was shortened, eliminating the references to Murder as "that other person" and "that man," certainly lines which help to build the sense of awe and dread in which his character is held. The wedding scene cuts to Murder reaching for the candle and does not show the opening view of the mansion with Murder backing up. In the banquet scene, Madeline's line "I see happiness" is cut. In the impressive and effective long scene between Bruner and Neil, where Bruner explains the possible scientific fact behind the zombie superstition, the scene is cut after Bruner says, "...we can go to Beaumont's house first." In Sinister's and the Roan Group's versions the scene concludes with Bruner saying, "Before we get through with this, we may uncover sins even the devil would be ashamed of." And, as the camera pans back behind John Harron, Bruner exclaims, "Oh, these witch doctors!" The scene, as originally filmed and presented in Sinister's and the Roan Group's version, preserves a nice symmetry, as the scene had opened with the camera panning out from behind John Harron. All in all, I found the quality of the picture and sound to be bad enough to appreciably reduce the viewing enjoyment of the Foothill version, and this was compounded by the numerous missing bits. To be fair, by the time you read this, Foothill may have upgraded their version, so it would be advisable to check with them before ordering.

As Buddy Barnett noted in his review, which appeared in *Cult Movies* number 7, of the

colored version of *White Zombie*, put out by Republic Home Video, the black and white version put out by Sinister Cinema was previously the best available commercially, being almost exactly sixty-seven (67) minutes long and reproduced from a beautiful 35mm master. The desirability of this tape was augmented by Greg Luce's decision to include the "Lost Lugosi Interview" on the tape, an interview made for television with Lugosi the day prior to his release from the Metropolitan State Hospital in August, 1955 and apparently never broadcast. Since this interview is only available on Sinister's tape, to a Lugosi fan this version is worth purchasing for this interview alone, as it is one of only three interviews on film that Lugosi gave, as far as I am aware. At the present time, that interview is believed to be the last time that Lugosi's voice was recorded on film, and he held up very well before the blunt questions of the interviewer.

Sinister Cinema (aka Greg Luce) cooperated with the Roan Group by allowing their 35mm print to be used as one of the sources for the laser disc version and is licensed to market the VHS version of the Roan restoration. Sinister still includes the Lost Lugosi Interview at the beginning of the new tape, but as far as I am aware, does not include the 1952 trailer, which appears at the beginning of the laser disc.

A quibble, perhaps, but all of my Sinister tapes start out with a test pattern and an annoying whistle/siren sound which drives me to the Mute button on my remote control. I wish they would find a way to eliminate the shrill whistle, at least.

I compared the old Sinister Cinema version - remember, the best previously available - side by side with the Roan laser disc version, and I found that the picture and sound quality of the laser disc version undeniably superb and is clearly superior to the old tape.

I interviewed Cary Roan in April, 1995, and he indicated that he had spent over \$20,000.00 on the restoration process, using a computer to select the best frames from two 35mm prints of the film. He said they used a "wetgate process"

to eliminate scratches on the film, which is used only rarely, because the fluid has a tendency to dissolve latex in the equipment. They used another process to eliminate pops and hisses in the soundtrack. And they put a matte in the Rank printer to cut down the light aperture, which causes scenes like the one in the crypt, which used to look grey, to darken, so that the blacks are really black, as they should be. Mr. Roan also noted that each of the prints was cut for television in the 1950s to sixty-seven (67) minutes running time, and that each of them had the made in (different) dialogue portions of the film. He noted that even though in a couple of places he had to use a freeze-frame process, (if you look carefully, you can see that the characters' lips do not move, although you hear them speaking), the dialogue now is complete except for just one sentence.

Mr. Roan noted that the film was shot using a silent camera, with separate RCA sound equipment. (This may have facilitated the fluidity and mobility of the camera work, one of the outstanding features of the film), with the result that the picture was about 1.2 times wider than a standard 35mm frame. Mr. Roan letterboxed the film, with the result that this is the only version to allow one to see the scenes as originally filmed. This is especially noticeable in the scenes in the main room of the castle, where the figures of Legendre and Beaumont tended to be partially cut off. Where Legendre takes the zombie Madeline's hand in his and almost appears to use his other hand like the claw of a bird of prey to grasp it, one can now see his hand clearly, where it was mostly obscured in the earlier version.

The laser disc version, of course, also offers the options of selecting a particular "chapter" or freeze frame or slow motion advance and reverse, clear technical advances over the tape version which allows one to fully appreciate the artistry of Lugosi's expressions and gestures, particularly in the scene where he bewitches Madeline.

(continued)

Alice in Acidland (1968)

Cautionary tale about the swinging 60's highlighted by psychedelic orgy montage.

Aphrodisiac (1971)

Skin and smoke flick features marijuana documentary footage and hardcore action.

titus moody

The Dirtiest Game in the World

Last of the American Hoboes

Chi Chi's Nite Out

Outlaw Motorcycles

john aes nihil

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To my surprise, although the disc jacket claims a sixty-eight (68) minutes running time, I found that the disc ran about twenty (20) seconds less than the older VHS tape from Sinister Cinema. Running the two side by side disclosed that there appears to be two relatively minor cuts in the laser disc version. The significance to Lugosi fans is that the profile shot where he stares at the just-completed wax effigy of Madeline is cut short; in the older version, the pose is held for several more seconds while Lugosi appears to be ensnaring her in his spell by sheer force of will, which is conveyed by the intensity of his expression and the tension he appears to exert while holding the effigy out in front of him. The second shortened bit is the end of the tavern scene where Neil (the wimpy hero) is trying to drink away his sorrows and fancies he sees his lost beloved reflected in the shadows on the wall. After several vain attempts to clasp her image, he turns toward the camera while leaning against the far wall, gets a very odd, almost cross-eyed, expression on his face and extends his arms toward the camera. Again, this last portion is cut short. Presumably, these excisions are also missing from the new Sinister Cinema tape.

Accompanying the informative jacket notes, which helpfully identify most of the major players, including the zombies, is an extensive commentary by Garydon Rhodes. The only quibbles of note are that perhaps the praise for Clarence Muse's tiny part is a bit over-effusive, a bit more discussion of the question of whether Lugosi actually directed portions of the film would have been merited, as the film is considered to be one of the masterpieces of the genre and, if true, it is apparently the only film to which Lugosi contributed behind-the-camera work. Finally, (shades of Videosonic Arts number 1!) the pictures do not have any captions! This is a shortcoming which seems to be endemic to material on Lugosi.

The laser disc does not contain the Lost Lugosi Interview, which is still available on the new Sinister Cinema version, but it *does* have a beautiful reproduction of the 1952 re-issue trailer done in sepia tone. Finally there is also a reproduction of the pressbook, but (be warned!) I was expecting, like, thirty-two (32) pages of material, and it is only four (4) pages long. Still nice to have, though.

Perhaps one should not neglect to mention the striking portrait on the cover of the disc, the



Stranger things are happening than you ever dreamed of...

same one used in the advertisements for the disc, of Lugosi as Murder Legendre. Cary Roan said this portrait was done in 1932, apparently, but then never used in the promotion of the film at the time. I believe arrangements are being made

to reproduce copies of the picture which may be framed, as well as Murder Legendre T-shirts.

Courtesy of Buddy Barnett, I recently viewed the colorized version of the film, referred to above. Buddy said that that version is six (6) minutes shorter than the full-length versions but contains all of Lugosi's scenes. Now, I *detest* colorized movies and was fully prepared to dismiss the colorized version as a travesty. To my surprise, however, the colors were quite atmospheric. Being almost pastel, the film most closely brought to mind the lovely tinted lobby cards of the period (think of those from *Dracula*). Even though it was definitely a novelty, it would actually be a nice-to-have item, although I would not recommend it if you only want to get one version of the film.

To the person fortunate enough to have a laser disc player, the Roan Group version offers the ultimate in picture and sound quality, as well as deluxe packaging and commentary, all at a price of \$39.95.

For those who do not have laser disc players or for Lugosi fans who do not now have the Lost Lugosi Interview, the Sinister Cinema version, which sells for \$16.95 is the one for you.

And the true Lugosi/*White Zombie* aficionado might want to add the colorized version as well.

One thing is certain, with all of the attention from reviewers which the laser disc version is receiving, the reputation of *White Zombie* and the recognition given to Lugosi's masterful performance as Murder Legendre can only be enhanced, and there is a version available for every taste and pocketbook.

Reviewed by Johanne L. Tournier

The Thing (1982)

Directed by John Carpenter; written by Bill Lancaster; with Kurt Russell, Keith David, Richard Masur, Wilford Brimley, Richard Dysart, Donald Moffat; available on MCA Home Video and laserdisc (letterboxed format).

When he was interviewed in 1951 about his feelings regarding Howard Hawk's version of his story *Who Goes There*, John W. Campbell said (approximately): "They paid well for the rights, they made a very successful picture — someday, maybe someone will make a movie out of my story."

Interviewed much later, Christian Nyby (credited director of *The Thing from Another World*) stated flatly that they'd purchased the rights to get the "saucer in ice and thermite bomb" sequence; the rest of Campbell's story was scrapped in favor of the more practical (for it's time) "bloodthirsty plantman" menace.

I saw John Carpenter's adaptation of Campbell's "Golden Age" *Astounding* novella with Nyby and Kenneth Tobey at a Van Nuys theater during its initial run. Tobey enjoyed the picture. Nyby didn't. He wrote it off as a "good commercial for J & B Scotch."

The filmgoing public didn't respond well to it either, which is no surprise. In a cinematic time of sweet/smiling ETs, no one wanted to be confronted by a shape-shifting alien nightmare with the disposition of a grossly hung-over Satan, a monster making *The Dunwich Horror* come off like *Casper the Friendly Ghost*.

Finally, this movie offered no happy endings.

The Thing is arguably Carpenter's best film. It's definitely his most frightening and it could easily be lauded as a cult classic in times to come — some have already conferred that status on it. Carpenter went back to and perfected Campbell's bleak alien bio-horror in Bill Lancaster's crisp scenario, then turned it over to SFX maestro Rob Bottin, fresh from his "monumental" lycanthropics in *The Howling*. Admittedly an over-the-top workaholic, Bottin drove himself into a temporary state of collapse with this movie, overshadowing actors Kurt Russell and Keith David as the star of the pic-



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ture.

Don't ever try watching a network cut of *The Thing* — it's so badly chopped up and re-edited that Bottin's name in the credits becomes academic, even laughable. For the best possible sound and visual (these are paramount factors for this movie), a good laserdisc viewing is definitely recommended. In any case, see it and see if you don't agree that John Carpenter's done nothing to be ashamed of here. You'll find that even the panning and prowling moments of dead silence will get on your nerves, big time!

Reviewed by Spider Subke

Some Like It Violent

(1968, Prod & Directed by Kemal Horulu. Executive producer Barry Mahon, 72 min.)

Gangster: "If you stay smart you'll live a nice long life."

Business Woman: "I intend to. Because life is short and I've learned lots of lessons."

Redundant exchanges such as this exemplify the meandering dialogue and plotline of Barry Mahon's *Some Like It Violent*, a classic of the nude-roughie age. The film, shot mostly in people's apartments, is full of broads, booze, and lots of rough talk. Characters include goons, molls, executives, detectives — all in cartoon fashion without any of them being very animated. A beautifully kinky opening scene of a psycho bashing the hell out of mannequins — all female mannequins mind you — is abandoned, in favor of a more traditional mob story of take-overs and prostitution.

At times the shadowy black & white photography evokes a fearful edge above and beyond the overall nature of the film. Transferred from a beautiful 35mm print. (\$22.95 ppd. from: Alpha-Blue Archives, PO Box 16072, Oakland, CA 94601.) It's interesting to see this early directing turn by Kemal Horulu, who made a name for himself with explicit sex films in the 1980s.

Reviewed by Michael Copner

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CULT MOVIE STUFF

by Buddy Barnett



dental co-authored with brother Drew Friedman. His CD *The Worst* deserves to be heard by a wide audience and I recommend it highly.

To get your copy of *The Worst* on CD, send \$16.50 (postage included) to Black Cracker Music, P.O. Box 720523, Dallas TX 75372.

Speaking of Bela Lugosi, I just heard that *Midnight Marquee's* Gary & Susan Svehla have embarked on a new publishing venture in addition to their regular *Midnight Marquee* magazine. It looks like they are going to be publishing several horror sci-fi genre cinema history and essay paperback books. They sound like the kind of books that McFarland and Scarecrow put out in hardback in the \$40 to \$75 price range. The *Midnight Marquee* books seem to all be in the \$10 to \$20 range, so this is great news for *Cult Movies* fans.

One of their first releases is going to be a book of essays on popular Bela Lugosi movies (I bet they left out *Murder By Television*, well I like it!) by a variety of respected writers including our old pal Tom Weaver. It's listed as shipping October 1, 1995 and will sell for \$20 and you get 324 pages! This is fantastic news for Bela Lugosi fans.

Some of the upcoming releases that they are advertising include *Guilty Pleasure of the Horror Film* (Sounds like a good one to me. I can think of dozens right off the top of my head. *Black Dragons* anyone?); *Cinematic Hauntings*; *Those Astounding Science Fiction/Horror Movie Double Features*; and *Bitches, Bimbos and Virgins: Women in Horror Movies* (That one sounds pretty good, too!). For more information, write to *Midnight Marquee Press, Inc.* 9721 Brittain Lane, Baltimore Maryland 21234. Tell 'em that Buddy Barnett sent you.

Spider Subke, one of our popular writers, has just published his first book of poetry, *Synema Noir*. Out here on the West Coast, he's

Welcome to another addition of *Cult Movie Stuff*. Since our last thrill packed issue I've dug up some more cool stuff for you to check out!

First off: The last couple of years have been really good ones for Ed Wood and Bela Lugosi fans with the release of the Tim Burton film *Ed Wood* (which is doing very well on video by the way), Martin Landau's Academy Award® for his great portrayal of Bela Lugosi, and all of the books, magazines and rare and obscure Ed Wood and Bela videos that have been coming out lately. There is a lot of great stuff to choose from.

This issue I want to focus on a really interesting CD that actually came out late last year. The CD is titled *The Worst* and it is an epic musical based on the life of none other than the late great Edward D. Wood Jr. This fully orchestrated musical tragicomedy was written by singer/songwriter/guitarist **Josh Alan Friedman**. *The Worst* is not connected to Tim Burton's *Ed Wood* film in any way. As a matter of fact, *The Worst* was in the works many years

before the announcement of the Tim Burton movie.

Josh Alan wrote the musical as a stage production but, as we all know, stage productions take forever to get off the ground. So Josh Alan decided to first release his work as a fully orchestrated CD. The results are mighty impressive; the music and songs are alternately funny, tragic, outrageous and melancholy. The CD is worth purchasing for the magnificent "Bela's Funeral Dirge" alone. The recording quality of this CD is outstanding and Josh Alan used some of the best singers and musicians from the state of Texas in the recording of this gem.

Also included with the CD is a 20-page story and lyric booklet illustrated by Josh Alan's brother, cult artist Drew Friedman. The package itself is sure to be a collectors item in the near future.

Josh Alan is an accomplished/award winning acoustic guitarist and is author and coauthor of three published books including *Any Similarity to Persons Living or Dead Is Purely Coinc-*

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won a few prizes for his offbeat style of poetic expression. His writing is kind of a gritty hybrid of poetry and fiction. He says that his stuff is 75% autobiographical and 25% fanciful. Or is that 25% autobiographical and 75% fanciful? Spider isn't exactly sure anymore, you see, he did some heavy living in the swinging '60s.

Synema Noir is candid, "Adults Only" reading that touches on many movie themes; Spider even included a poem dedicated to *Cult Movies Magazine* (by the way, that's not why I'm plugging his book; *Synema Noir* is well written). *Synema Noir* is full of weird, surreal stuff and is not for the squeamish or easily offended. Possibly the weirdest dirty book of all time.

To order *Synema Noir* send check or money order for \$10 postage paid to Spider Subke, 4055 Tujunga Ave. #308, Studio City CA 91604.

Our friends at **Network Enterprises** have some new video releases that they want me to tell you about. The first is a dreadful comedy(?) called *The Fat Spy* and starring hack comedian Jack E. Leonard. This one is so bad it's good! *The Fat Spy* is an inept spoof of spy films and beach movies (a parody of a parody). The movie has a lot of great '60s atmosphere and color. *The Fat Spy* co-stars Jayne Mansfield, Phyllis Diller (who gets top billing) and Brian Donlevy. Jayne Mansfield must have been really hard up when she did this travesty; she even settles for fourth billing! This is a must see nevertheless!

Network has also just put out *Kansas City Bomber* with Raquel Welch. KCB is the classic cheesy roller derby movie with plenty of violence roller derby style. See Raquel kick some ass on the roller derby rink. Their next release is a weird Lash Larue B-Western, *Law of the Lash*. Lash Larue is definitely an acquired taste, a kind of skid row B-Western Humphrey Bogart.

Harlem Rides the Range rounds out the quartet of new releases. It is exactly what it sounds like, an all black B-Western. *Harlem Rides the Range* is a sequel to the presumably

lost *Harlem on the Prairie* which starred the great comedy genius Mantan Moreland. Unfortunately, Mantan is nowhere to be found in this sequel as he had gone on to bigger and better things at Monogram Studios. On the plus side this features actor/filmmaker/future star of *Amos and Andy* Spencer Williams. All things considered, *Harlem Rides the Range* is just another dreary B-Western with all of the expected cliches, once you get past the novelty of it all.

You can get all of the above titles plus many more fine films from Network Enterprises. See their ad elsewhere in this issue.

The staff of *Cult Movies* had a great time meeting many of our readers at the recent *Famous Monsters Of Filmland* convention. Even more fun were the site seeing trips to Bela Lugosi location sites and homes with the unofficial Bela Lugosi fan club. It was great, we visited some fun places like Monogram Studios, The Bekins Warehouse where Bela shot *The Whispering Shadow*, some of the places where Ed Wood shot footage with Lugosi, etc.

We all had a real thrill when we actually got to go inside the Lugosi house on Hudson (He lived there when he filmed *Dracula* in 1930). It was exciting to stand on the actual steps that Lugosi walked on and to lean against the fireplace where he was photographed so often. Okay, so I admit it, we are a bunch of fan geeks. I wish that everybody who reads *Cult Movies* could have been there.

Even though most people can't do this tour in person, *Cult Movies* does offer a videotape tour of Lugosi's many homes, hangouts, and filming locations. See the interior of the Hudson Street house; See Monogram Studios and sights where Lugosi shot *Black Dragons* and *Corpse Vanishes*. See locations for *Return of Chandu*, *The Death Kiss* and *White Zombie*. This videotape was shot six years ago so you will see some locations that don't even exist anymore, such as the liquor store/deli that Lugosi frequented. And there is much much more.

Bela Lugosi Then and Now is more than just a Hollywood tour, it's a video magazine with over 200 rare photos from Lugosi's life captured on film. There are segments on Bela's personal friend and guru Manly P. Hall; reminiscences of actor Conrad Brooks' experiences with Bela and even rare film footage of Bela Lugosi donating blood during a war drive in the 1940s. *Bela Lugosi Then and Now* is a fond tribute to every sane person's favorite movie actor.

To order send \$9.95 plus \$2.50 for shipping and handling to *Cult Movies* 6201 Sunset Blvd Suite 152, Hollywood CA 90028

Also available from us at *Cult Movies* is the video documentary *On the Trail of Ed Wood*, which was the first documentary ever produced about Ed Wood and his strange life and films. At the time that we originally released *On the Trail of Ed Wood* nearly six years ago, we received some criticism for calling Edward D. Wood Jr "Ed Wood." Many people said to us, "He's known as Edward D. Wood Jr. Why do you call him Ed Wood on your tape?"

My answer then was that Ed Wood sounded more friendly and intimate than the unwieldy and cumbersome Edward D. Wood Jr. I think that many people must have agreed with me because several years later the Tim Burton film about Wood's early life was called *Ed Wood!*

Well anyway, our *Ed Wood* video has lots of info and insights into the tragic side of Ed Wood's bizarre life and career. You can get *On the Trail of Ed Wood* from us for \$9.95 plus \$2.50 shipping and handling. Mail to *Cult Movies*, 6201 Sunset Blvd Suite 152, Hollywood CA 90028

I'm out of space for this issue so I'll say goodbye till next time. Remember, if you have any *Cult Movie Stuff* for sale that you'd like me to mention write to me, Buddy Barnett, at *Cult Movies*, 6201 Sunset Blvd Suite 152, Hollywood CA 90028. I'll try to include as many things as possible in future issues.■

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The Samurai Film: A Neglected Genre Part 3:

Kaidan (Ghost Stories); Female Samurai

by Chris D.

For all the discussions and comparisons, the similarities and differences between the Samurai film and the Western, one deeply rooted identical trait is the conception of hero. However grungy, cynical, rude he/she is in both genres, the bottom line is self-sacrifice. The hero/heroine is willing to go all the way, to fight the evil oppressor, to forego comfort, wealth, familial/conjugal love, freedom, and even life, itself (however reluctantly). And for what reason? To save a way of life or to save the lives of others. How the story evolves depends on the hero/heroine's individual circumstances. What draws the audience in, what creates dynamic tension and suspense comes with how human the filmmakers make their characters. The selfish vs. the selfless warring within the psyche. In fact, the amount of reluctance a hero/heroine manifests in resisting their role of savior and the time they spend on such soul-searching exponentially increases the audience's absorption in the tale. Why? Because the more human, i.e. vulnerable and imperfect, the hero/heroine, the more human, i.e. not-all-bad, the villains are, the more we're able to identify with them.

In America, the myths of the Western evolved from the pioneer spirit, the role model of the immigrant fleeing from a land of oppression to a new land of freedom where one could pursue a way of life in regards to commerce, religion, familyhood without government interference. From the first generation frontiersman in the pioneer dream of expansion came the second



Kanto Woman's Bad Temper, 1969 (Kanto Onna Dokonjo) #4 of 4.

generation gunfighter: displaced wanderers, especially after the Civil War, whom were alienated and disconnected by the horrors of a chaotic slaughter organized on a mass scale. Men who possessed the skill to fight and slay, then left in the lurch when deprived of their military status. How they adjusted to peacetime determined their status of hero, villain or just normal, everyday, peace-loving citizen.

Of course, the first two are what the mythmakers, the storytellers were/are interested in: the lawmen, train robbers, bank robbers, bounty hunters, killers who became lawmen and the killers who stayed killers. Obviously the Civil War wasn't the only catalyst — it *did* act as horrible nationwide trauma that affected virtually every family in North America. America also had its schizophrenic policy towards Native Americans with do-gooder contingents on the one side wishing to keep treaties and reserve vast, fertile land parcels for the Indian and genocidal militarists, industrialists and land/robber barons on the other side who believed "the only good Indian is a dead Indian." Think how this strange duality played out in the brains of most citizens. However, just the absence of law and the chaos it spawned in westward expansion served as perfect environment to create heroes-and-villains myths.

And the only other environment since ancient Greece that was as ideal for the development of such heroes-and-villains mythologies was in Japan. First the clan wars in the 1500s into the early 1600s where the samurai warrior really solidified the code of *bushido* — the feudal code of honor and loyalty to one's master/clan above all else, including one's own family. Then came the comparative peace of most of the 17th, all of the 18th and the first half of the 19th centuries — a result of the Tokugawa shogunate, a regime of iron clad rule. During their centuries of absolute power, the Tokugawas perfected a system of safeguards guaranteed to crush and suppress at the first symptoms of unrest. A nefarious cutthroat program of checks-and-balances made up of *ninja* spies, assassins and public executions. A *daimyo* (lord) was appointed by the Shogun to rule over a given province, protected in their castle and abetted by their clan. A clan was a *daimyo*'s extended family and, for all practical purposes, his own private army.

Every other year or so a *daimyo* would have to spend a year in the capital, a practice the Shogunate employed to keep an eye on their underlings. Even still, corruption was rife in the hinterlands. But ultimately both the *daimyos* and the Shogunate could be held equally accountable for an increasingly unfair/unrealistic scale of taxes on the farmers. What with the straitjacket strictures of protocol and proper behavior for *daimyos* that proved-impossible-to-live-by, the impossible push-pull debt/obligation in unjust taxes represented by rice crop confiscation, the emergence of a financially stronger-and-stronger merchant class, more and more samurais saw the dissolving of their clans.

In the last one hundred years of the Tokugawa regime (it toppled in the 1860s), stories of *ronin*, or wandering, masterless samurai, became popular. These *ronin* might end up becoming bodyguards/mercenaries — *yojinbos* — for rich merchants, lower echelon officials or newly appointed lords without clans of their own; they might become thieves, artists/artisans, or sword instructors; or *matatabi* — roving lone-wolf gamblers drifting from village to village in search of fortune.

There were also stories of clans and their retainers still glorying in *bushido* and allegiance to the Shogun: stories of misfits — swordsmen brought up inside a clan since birth but unable to fit into the mold; stories of swordsmen who were orphans adopted by a clan and brought up in the *daimyo*'s or retainer's family only to have their bastard status eat away at their peace of mind, or some jealous fellow clansman using the protagonist's illegitimate status to throw a monkey wrench into their consideration as heir; tales of swordsmen and ladies-in-waiting brought up to marry arranged mates only to be unable to forget their true loves, thus instigating all manner of tragedy and, more than likely, prodigious bloodshed; accounts of men and women brought up in poverty to become thieves, cutthroats, brigands or shanghaied and trained as *ninja* spies/assassins.

Probably more than any other culture, Japan has the historical backdrop that provides a perfect psychological environment for the creation of the tortured hero/heroine (or anti-hero). A society that literally for centuries has stressed the group over the individual, oftentimes to the



Yotsuya Ghost Story, 1927. Directed by Kiichiro Sato.

point of familial destruction and unbearable transgressions against the individual conscience. Hundreds of years of forced practices to promote personal sacrifice for the good of the nation which in reality have too often turned out to be fascist scams rooted in bureaucratic hypocrisy, all to push along imperialist agendas.

Lest this begin to sound too much like Poly Sci 101, what I'm getting at is much of the hero/heroine mythology in Japan is rooted in a much more aggressive, and sometimes perverse, assertion of individual identity — however disguised and sublimated — than many Western cultures. Many times in Japanese genre films/books/comics, heroes/anti-heroes will end up making the ultimate sacrifice, giving their lives to save others, not because they have to or are supposed to, but because after much wrestling with conscience, they have come to the conclusion it's the only path they can take.

There are two very well-known Hollywood schlockmeisters famous for their extremely successful, big-budget sci-fi and adventure films, films targeted primarily at children or "Gee, goo-goo, gah-gah the inner-child-in-all-of-us" who have openly acknowledged their plot-spinning debts to such *chanbara* (swordplay cinema) as *Seven Samurai* and *The Hidden Fortress*, elements of which they managed to effectively homogenize into archetypal pabulum for lowest-common-denominator mass consumption. Unfortunately, besides one of their number helping a great Japanese director find financing for one of his films, this acknowledged interest has not served to attract very many new fans to the samurai film as a genre.

There are many truly fine directors such as Martin Scorsese, John Milius, Paul Schrader (also a *yakuza* film fanatic), the late Sam Peckinpah, Francis Ford Coppola, Clint Eastwood et al. who have declared themselves avid samurai film aficionados. Clint Eastwood, in fact, had for years retained the rights to remake the *Lone Wolf and Child* (*Kozure Okami*) series but apparently was never able to make the elements coalesce into any coherent Western celluloid iconography. Doubtless the characters' class distinctions and feudal historical background posed problems. Still, making comprehensive to Western minds the complex spiritual ideas, the saga's transcendental nihilism, undoubtedly proved an even more insurmountable obstacle. Being able to transpose the story of a stoic, invincible warrior, a man suffused with integrity as well as lethal cold-bloodedness wan-



Ghost of Yotsuya, 1959. Directed by Nobuo Nakagawa.

dering with his infant son through the gory carnage of a hellishly existential wonderland — the mind boggles how one could do it justice in both a Western (as in culture) and western (as in film genre) context. I don't know the details of why it's never happened (it would seem too late at this point), but I surmise Eastwood had the good sense and taste to realize that he would be unable to do justice to the story, especially alongside the six original Toho masterpieces. If it ain't broke, don't fix it!

Why have I brought up all this about various film directors from the West being fans of samurai films? Subconsciously, I think, I'm trying to get across to at least a few of you more adventurous souls out there that it's okay to take a bit of initiative and search out some of these cinematic masterpieces... subtitles notwithstanding. For not only is the samurai film a neglected genre in the U.S., but also in its country of origin. Here in America we have access to most older American films what with specialty video shops, the American Movie Channel, etc... But in Japan, the only other country in the world with a film legacy comparable in quality and quantity to the U.S., the younger generation have

all but abandoned their cinematic roots. Open up most Japanese film magazines and you won't find Japanese films, you'll find 95% American films, 4% Euro and Hong Kong films and perhaps 1% newer Japanese cinema. No older Japanese films at all. The somewhat intellectual/artistic *Kinema Junpo* (which has been around for decades) is the sole exception. And Japanese video stores (at least in Southern California) are almost as bad — most have a tiny selection of older *yakuza* films, with one or two even having a handful of samurai films. Nevertheless, we're talking minuscule. Before going on to this article's main topics, two sub-genres of the samurai film, let me make one more statement to the younger, Generation X Japanese who are more familiar with *The Magnificent Seven* than *Seven Samurai*, more familiar with *Star Wars* than *Hidden Fortress*, more familiar with *Wolf* than *Lone Wolf and Child* — Use It Or Lose It!!! Stop being ashamed of a cinematic legacy every bit as spectacular and possessed of magic as America, stop being ashamed of some of the coolest films ever made!

Kaidan (Ghost Story)

Kai=strange, mysterious *Dan*=story

In and of itself, the term *kaidan* doesn't automatically evoke images of samurai swordsmen, period costuming and candle-lit interiors. But, as is the case with many horror films from the West, particularly Great Britain, the time/setting for *kaidan* opuses quite often ended up pre-20th century. Japan, even more than Europe, delved into their treasure trove of ancient folk tales of ghosts, demons, imps, goblins, vampires and shape-shifters when looking for scenarios for the cinema. During the '50s and '60s, period horror films outnumbered contemporary, or *gendai*, horror films three-to-one. One reason is that, until the mid-'60s, in-period stories of any genre — especially adventure (samurai), love, *yakuza*, and sometimes even comedies — were the most popular. Also, the existence of ghosts and monsters automatically conjures up the irrational, an earlier time when strange, seemingly extraordinary happenings were attributed to the supernatural rather than being investigated coolly and calmly in a scientific manner. Gradually, contemporary subject matter took hold in Japanese horror cinema, going from about 50/50 circa 1970 to nearly 100% today. In-period *kaidans* do occasionally still pop up.

(continued)



100 Monsters, 1968. Directed by Kimiyoshi Yasuda.

but, alas, they are few and far between. Unhappily, this is now true of all Japanese period films.

The primary *kaidan* I'm going to discuss is the *Yotsuya Ghost Story* (*Yotsuya Kaidan*) which has proven to be the most popular horror saga ever in Japanese cinema, being remade at least 14 times since the 1920s. To my knowledge all versions (except perhaps Kinji Fukasaku's *Yotsuya Ghost Story — Loyal 47 Ronin* from 1994) have been based on the Kabuki play *Tokaido Yotsuya Kaidan* by Nanboku Tsuruya (1744-1829).

It's the story of Iemon, a samurai of dubious virtue and weak character who marries Oiwa, the daughter of a clan retainer. Almost immediately after their wedding, disaster strikes in the form of their clan being abolished by the Shogunate. Reduced to making parasols while Oiwa nurses their infant, Iemon is perpetually moody and grows more and more abusive to Oiwa. Oiwa's health, already weak, deteriorates. A commoner friend of Iemon, Naosuke, starts putting ideas into Iemon's head that his middle class life will only get worse, soon plunging him into poverty. Naosuke also desires Oiwa's sister, Osode, and schemes to kill her fiancée, Yomoshichi (in some versions with Iemon's knowledge/help, in some versions without). This accomplished, Naosuke gets Iemon thinking about looking for greener pastures re: a spouse.

One day while out walking, Iemon comes across Oume and her maid who are being victimized by ruffians. Iemon fights them off. Afterwards he is the image of humility, refusing any reward. A brief introduction is made and he departs. Naosuke has been watching, and when he has Iemon alone, immediately brings up the idea of killing Oiwa and marrying Oume. Iemon is initially repulsed by the idea and, again, depending on the version, puts up some resistance/no resistance. Naosuke obtains poison from a Dutch pharmacy (Holland was the only European nation Japan traded with until the Tokugawas fell in the 1860s) and gives it to Iemon to slip into Oiwa's tea. They've decided on poison since Iemon can't stomach the idea of slaying her with his sword.

Iemon and Naosuke decide to draw a lecherous masseur, Takuetsu, into their web. For some time he's been giving Oiwa massages for her back pains and is clearly desirous of her. Iemon explains he wants to divorce Oiwa and asks Takuetsu to seduce her so he'll have a legitimate excuse to leave and remarry. Already Oume's father is sending messages inviting Iemon to their house. It turns out she's fallen in-love with him, and her parents are only too happy since they've been unable to find her a suitable husband. Oiwa's only servant, Kohei (who is somewhat smitten with Oiwa) attempts to warn her of the chicanery afoot. But Oiwa is too trusting. Kohei leaves on an errand. Traversing an isolated rural path by a lake, he's waylaid by Naosuke and killed (some versions show Naosuke and Iemon both killing him) When Iemon accepts the invitation to come courting Oume, he lies to Oiwa, telling her he's going to see about a job. Before he leaves, he fixes Oiwa the first dose of poison in her tea, explaining it's medicine for her failing health.

Takuetsu arrives to give Oiwa her evening massage. As the massage progresses, he becomes physically more familiar with Oiwa. She doesn't immediately notice because she is becoming so ill. Takuetsu makes a grab for her inner thigh, and she slaps his hand away, reprimanding him. Turning into the light, he sees her face for the first time and shouts in horror. She has become hideously disfigured from the poison — ugly bruises and festering, bleeding sores have blossomed on her temple, puffing her eye out in a hideous swelling. She screams when she peers into her mirror then deliriously combs her hair. It comes out in large clumps, and both her and Takuetsu grow more distraught.

Meanwhile at the courtship meeting, Iemon is agreeing to marry Oume. He accepts a large sum of money from the girl's father. Back at the house, Oiwa grabs a small sword and tries to kill Takuetsu, who stumbles around the room, quaking with terror. She drives the sword/knife into the wall, and it becomes stuck. Just then Iemon returns. He's shocked at Oiwa's horrible state. Takuetsu's fear mushrooms as he hadn't known this was going to be part of the bargain. Realizing it was Iemon who poisoned her and destroyed her beauty, Oiwa lunges at him. She stumbles and falls against the stuck-in-wall-



Illusion of Blood, 1965. Directed by Shiro Toyoda.

blade, cutting her throat. In most versions, Iemon then slays Takuetsu (in some it's the servant, Kohei), surmising the masseur will serve as the ideal scapegoat.

Naosuke arrives and helps Iemon nail the bodies to either side of a large wooden door. When finished, they haul their grotesque cargo to the swampy lake where they usually fish and submerge it. The sky becomes darker, thunder cracks and lightning flashes. Oiwa's spirit appears to Iemon asking him, "Why? What wrong did I do you?" He slashes at the apparition, to Naosuke's amusement (he hasn't seen any ghosts yet). They part company. Iemon returns to his new family and marries Oume. Some versions don't even show the wedding, just an immediate cut to the bridal chamber in the family's home. Iemon is about to make love to his new wife when a snake appears on the bed. He promptly kills it, then turns back to Oume. But she's been replaced by an embracing Oiwa who asks, "Why did you kill me?" Iemon lashes at her with his sword. Turning the corpse over, he finds Oume. As result of the commotion, the father knocks on the door, but when Iemon slides it open, he sees Takuetsu (or Kohei, depending on the version). Iemon thrusts his blade, and, when the body hits the floor, it's the father who is dying, drenched in blood. Outside the house, Iemon pauses in the moonlight to get his breath. Someone touches him on the shoulder. He whirls around to again face his deceased wife. Flailing away with his sword at the specter, he realizes he's just slain his new mother-in-law.

A day later at sunset, Naosuke is scrounging in the lake's marshy shallows, downstream from where they'd dumped the bodies. Not being particularly bright, he doesn't recognize Oiwa's heirloom comb and prized kimono when he digs them from clumps of seaweed. He wraps them up to take them as a gift for Osode (who, don't forget is Oiwa's sister). Iemon is totally demoralized by his state of affairs and has taken up residence in a temple, hoping to ward off the visions of ghosts he continually sees (Oume's family has joined Oiwa and Takuetsu/Kohei).

At Naosuke's, Osode is hanging her wash. Naosuke is wringing-out the newfound kimono in a bucket. He gives the comb to Osode, and

she immediately recognizes it as Oiwa's. This makes her remember a dream she had the night previous where Oiwa had appeared (Osode doesn't know yet she's dead since they live in a separate village), acting strangely and unable to speak. This clearly unnerves Naosuke, who tries to downplay the idea of the comb being Oiwa's. When Osode has her back turned, Naosuke feels something tugging at his ankle. He glances at the bucket and sees a woman's hand protruding from the water, holding tight to his leg. He screams. Osode asks what's wrong. He points at the bucket but the apparition is gone.

Just then Yomoshichi appears (Osode's fiancée Naosuke had supposedly killed). It turns out he was only wounded and was nursed back to health in a distant town. The night before, Oiwa had also come to him in a dream, revealing that Iemon and Naosuke had plotted her death and that Osode was living with Naosuke and where to find them. Naosuke panics and tries to run. Yomoshichi challenges him. Naosuke trips and is run through on Yomoshichi's sword. He confesses all as he dies. Yomoshichi and Osode dress in white, which is the customary color of death/revenge-seeking and make their way to the temple where Iemon is being tormented non-stop by the ghosts of those he's slain. Iemon fends off the avengers, racing through the forest, followed by not only the mortals but the ghosts. Finally he's stopped on the bridge over the lake. He's pierced by both Yomoshichi and Osode, then tumbles into the murky depths. In most versions, Oiwa's echoey, bloodcurdling laugh is all that is heard as the end titles fade to black.

Some Versions of the *Yotsuya Ghost Story* (*Yotsuya Kaidan*).

Note: (No Tape) means not out on video at this time.

1927 *Yotsuya Ghost Story* (*Yotsuya Kaidan*) Dir. Kiichiro Sato w/ Rokuro Akashi, Tsuruko Matsueda (No Tape)

1927 *Iro Alias Yotsuya Ghost Story* (*Iro Wa Kamei Yotsuya Kaidan*) Dir. Kintaro Inoue w/ Ryunosuke Tsukigata, Sumiko Suzuki (Makino Productions) (No Tape)

1928 *New Yotsuya Ghost Story For The Stage* (*Shinban Yotsuya Kaidan*) Dir. Daisuke Ito w/ Taisuke Matsumoto, Naoe Fushimi (Nikkatsu) (No Tape)

1937 *Broken Dishes at Bancho Mansion* (*Bancho Sara Yashiki*) Dir. Taizo Fuyujima w/ Kazuo Hasegawa, Kinuyo Tanaka (No Tape)

1949 *New Version of the Yotsuya Ghost Story* (*Shinshaku Yotsuya Kaidan*) (Part One: 86 min. Part Two: 73 min.) Dir. Keisuke Kinoshita w/ Kinuyo Tanaka, Ken Uehara, Haruko Sugimura, Hisako Yamane, Choko Ida, Osamu Takizawa This is one of the most critically respected versions of the story, at least in Japan. Kinoshita's reputation as one of Japan's "pantheon" directors is undoubtedly partly responsible. I haven't seen it, but, from what I've read, this version stresses the psychological deterioration of Iemon rather than any external supernatural forces. Rumor has it that this was, at least in part, due to the capricious strictures of U.S. Occupation forces, their paranoid perception that *jidai-geki*, or "in-period" scenarios, particularly if they involved swordplay, were symptomatic of fascist sentiments. (Shochiku) (No Tape?)

1956 *Yotsuya Ghost Story* (*Yotsuya Kaidan*) 86 min. Dir. Masaki Mori w/ Tomisaburo Wakayama, Haruo Tanaka, Chieko Soba, Matsuo Takahashi (Shintoho) VHS=Kurari (Clarion)

1957 *Ghost Story of Broken Dishes at Bancho Mansion* (*Kaidan Bancho Sara Yashiki*) Dir. Juichi Kono w/ Chiyonosuke Azuma, Hibari Misora.

Another one I haven't seen. Kono has turned out some pretty respectable sword pictures, maintaining balance between drama/intense performances and genuinely exciting action se-

quences. However, one thing that gives me pause is the late Hibari Misora was best known for her singing prowess. Many *jidai-geki* and/or samurai films she appeared in, especially in the fifties, found some way to sneak in a musical production number, at the very least a song or two, which nine times out of 10 worked to the detriment of the picture. But Misora was also an extremely talented actress in her own right and one of the prime examples (along with the late performers Raizo Ichikawa, Hashizo Okawa and Jiro Tamiya) of a huge star and major talent subjected to insane pressures, merciless schedules, comparatively mediocre salaries worked/stressed into early graves. Not all of Misora's films had musical interludes. Sometimes, if a director found it inappropriate to the subject matter, Misora would skip the songs. Hopefully this was one of those times. (Toei) (No Tape?)

1959 *Yotsuya Ghost Story* (*Yotsuya Kaidan* aka *Thou Shalt Not Be Jealous*) 82 min. Dir. Kenji Misumi w/ Kazuo Hasegawa, Yasuko Nakada, Yoko Uraji, Joji Tsurumi, Miko Kondo, Hideo Takamatsu, Naritoshi Hayashi

Considering Misumi at the helm and that this was only a year before he directed Raizo Ichikawa in Parts One and Two of the masterpiece *Daihosatsu Pass* trilogy, it's frustrating that this isn't a better film. From the looks of things, I would surmise it's Kazuo Hasegawa's ego to blame. He was Daiei's biggest star in the fifties and undoubtedly could write his own ticket. But if you aren't familiar with the *Yotsuya* story, you'd never notice. Contrary to the very nature of the tale, Hasegawa's lemon emerges as a not particularly bad guy, merely a sexist jerk tired of his wife. Yet there's no subtext, no previous history of Oiwa's family clan being abolished. It's implied that despite lemon's samurai pride, there was no traumatic fall from social/economic grace that precipitated events. The real villains — at least as far as committing murders are concerned — are Naosuke and his henchmen.

Kohel, who has a much bigger role than in other versions I've seen, tries to warn Oiwa of the danger afoot. Unfortunately, while he's out picking up medicine for Oiwa, Naosuke and friends murder him, and Naosuke returns to Oiwa, substituting poison for the herbal remedy. She takes it and becomes horribly disfigured. Realizing poison, she tries to first stab the elderly Takuetsu (who, though weak and lecherous, doesn't really know what's going down), then one of Naosuke's sleazy *ronin* pals who's stopped in to torment her. After the *ronin*'s slashed her once, it's his sword that breaks and gets stuck in the wall. When lemon returns home, he's repulsed by Oiwa, pushing her away from him; she falls against the blade in the wall and cuts her throat. Lemon flees, joining Oume at her home where he ends up severely wounding her when she appears to him as Oiwa. Frantic, he absconds again, this time finding Oiwa's and Kohel's bodies in the lake.

He retreats to a temple to pray for Oiwa. Meanwhile the whole episode with the comb, kimono and Oiwa's hand coming out of the laundry bucket still occurs, but with Takuetsu, not Naosuke. Yomoshichi and Osode confront Naosuke (Yomoshichi has never been wounded and separated from Osode in this version, and Naosuke has never gotten to make the moves on Osode as he'd desired). Naosuke confesses to Osode and Yomoshichi the murder of Oiwa. Lemon eavesdrops. He then kills Naosuke himself and takes his head to the bathhouse. Oume is recuperating there under the care of Ito, her patron, and Naosuke's two villainous pals. Lemon slays everyone involved in the plot to kill Oiwa.

Returning to the temple, he's followed by Osode and Yomoshichi who believe he's just as culpable as the others. But before they can confront him, lemon finds Oiwa's kimono lying on the temple floor. It rises and descends upon him, smothering him to death.



The Cursed Pond, 1968, with Kyoko Mikage.

Despite the somewhat tame tone — compared to other versions I've seen — and the changes which unquestionably diffuse much of the tension and dramatic force of the narrative, Misumi still manages to create some unforgettably evocative images: foremost, lemon praying in the temple when he's harassed by Oiwa's ghost, throwing his prayers beads at her which scatter, bursting into tiny balls of blue flame as they roll across the wood floor; lemon succumbing under Oiwa's kimono, then the bluish-grey light of the temple becoming golden, illuminating the Buddha as the sun comes up.

Oddly enough, black-and-white promo stills from this production are much scarier and atmospheric than the color cinematography would lead you to believe. **1/2 VHS(Japan)=Daiei

1959 *Ghost of Yotsuya* (*Tokaido Yotsuya Kaidan* aka *Yotsuya Ghost Story On The Tokaido Highway*) 96 min. (the version out on video from Hollywood Home Theater is closer to 79 min.) Dir. Nobuo Nakagawa w/ Shigeru Amachi, Kazuko Wakasugi, Noriko Kitazawa, Junko Ikeuchi, Shuntaro Emi, Ryuzaburo Nakamura, Jun Otomo

This, along with Toyoda's '65 *Illusion of Blood*, are acknowledged as the best films of *Yotsuya Kaidan*. Although I haven't read the play, I suspect that Nakagawa has remained the most faithful to the source. In fact, the film begins with characters on a stage. Once the titles have unspooled, we leave that set and dissolve to lemon prostrating himself in the moonlight before Oiwa's father, best friend and attendant as they walk home. Apparently he's been refused Oiwa's hand many times. The father grows angry, lemon tries to keep his patience but when both older men call him a fool and no better than a thief, he boils over and slays them. He's about to cut down the attendant so there will be no witnesses, when the man makes a proposition to him... it's Naosuke.

We next see lemon and Naosuke accompanying Oiwa, Osode and Osode's fiancée, Yomoshichi, down a country road in unbearably hot weather. They've been on a pilgrimage for many weeks searching for the "killer" of the girls' father. Naosuke has invented a story about a rogue who once had a run-in with their father. Oiwa is suddenly taken ill, suffering from heat prostration. Osode agrees to stay with Oiwa to rest while the men continue on to view the famous waterfall a couple miles away. Reaching the top of the waterfall, they push Yomoshichi over. Naosuke has blackmailed lemon into helping dispatch Yomoshichi so he can move in on Osode.

In this version, Nakagawa and Amachi imbue lemon with a tortured angst, a balance of

guilt and recrimination that, at times, almost makes lemon a sympathetic character. Lemon constantly refuses to be part of Naosuke's sordid schemes but is so terrified of being exposed as a murderer, he ultimately caves in, sinking himself deeper and deeper into a nightmare of his own devise. This adds immeasurably to the horror of the story.

When lemon and Naosuke return with Oiwa and Osode to Edo — where they've settled while on their revenge mission — the film pretty much follows the story elements I've already mentioned. However, both women characters are straining at the bit to find their father's killer (who the boys have explained was also Yomoshichi's slayer!) and this constantly being brought up adds to the discomfort and malaise lemon is experiencing. At one point, Naosuke actually does track down the rogue he'd blamed — a bandit he doesn't even know — and slays the man in a bamboo grove while the man's drunk. Takuetsu is enlisted by lemon to help him get a divorce from Oiwa. In this version, Kohel the servant doesn't appear at all. Once Oiwa dies, lemon slays Takuetsu and nails his body to the door along with Oiwa. Nakagawa uses intense color schemes of glowing red skies, purple night, the sounds of insects, frogs, wind, thunder, rain to create an unnerving ambience and convince us that an all too obvious soundstage is anything but. Sounds and colors, too, are intensified to portray lemon's accelerating emotional disintegration.

It's a real shame that the only video of this available is truncated, sheared of at least 15 minutes, possessed of fading color going to pink, full of scratches, and slightly squeezed (from its original scope ratio). This is one film Criterion should rush to put out on disc. I've seen a tape of the disc of Nakagawa's masterpiece, *Hell* (*Jigoku*) he made the following year, 1960, and the colors, shot compositions, everything about it is awe-inspiring. Even with this inferior, abbreviated video release I can tell this is, without question, in the same league. I've tried to order discs from Japan of both *Hell* and *Tokaido Yotsuya Kaidan* but apparently they may now be out-of-print. ****American subtitled VHS=Hollywood Home Theater; VHS (Japan)=Kurari (Clarion); Laser (Japan)=Nikkatsu (probably out-of-print)

1961 *Ghost of Oiwa* (*Kaidan Oiwa No Borei* aka *Yotsuya Ghost Story*) 94 min. Dir. Tai Kato w/ Tomisaburo Wakayama, Yoshiko Fujishiro, Jushiro Konoe, Hiroko Sakuramachi, Sentaro Fushimi

The late Tai Kato is one of a handful of unsung masters of Japanese genre filmmaking. He

(continued)

made scores of *chanbara* (samurai sword pictures) in the late fifties/early sixties, turning more to the *ninkyō* (chivalrous)-type *yakuza* film in the mid-sixties/early seventies. 1994 saw him receiving much re-evaluation in Japan with several retrospectives of his work. Stills from this version appear appropriately demented, especially with the late, great Wakayama as Iemon. The rest of the cast I'm sure is also stupendous with another great *chanbara* star, Jushiro Kōnoe, as the rat-bastard, Naosuke. Paul Schrader compared Tai Kato to Sergio Leone in a 1971 *Film Comment* article about *yakuza* films; you can see that kind of vibrant visual energy jumping out of the promo stills. Unfortunately this is not out on video! (Toei) (No Tape)

1965 *Illusion of Blood* (Yotsuya Kaidan) 105 min. Dir. Shiro Toyoda w/ Tatsuya Nakadai, Mariko Okada, Kanaburo Nakamura, Junko Ikeuchi, Mayumi Ozora, Keiko Awa, Masao Mishima, Eitaro Ozawa, Mikijiro Hira, Eijiro Tono

This is right up there with Nakagawa's '59 version, the best of many good versions. Toyoda seems to stick pretty closely to the original scenario. One problem is I haven't read the play which 99% of the films have been based on so I'm not absolutely positive.

Another problem is that I had to watch a dub off Japanese television that was not only shorn of approximately 10 minutes, but, even worse, pan-and-scanned. Toyoda composed many of his shots in intimate medium set-ups that, when deprived of a third of their visuals on the TV screen, create a claustrophobic sense of confusion. Amazing that this masterpiece transcends the horrible restrictions — I was just thinking, can you imagine any other form of art or media so bedeviled by setbacks as the wide-screen film? The answer is right there in the question: because not only is it art but media which implies commerce, which implies mediocre minds, insensitive technicians cutting corners (literally) to save money and not annoy the average consumer/viewer. Sorry for the digression.

Toyoda creates an almost unbearable descent into monstrous personal betrayal, showing the erosion of Iemon's (Nakadai) ideals/ morals/ affections by greed and a kind of macho insecurity. Watching along with Takuetsu as Oiwa's (Okada) brow swells blue with seeping arterial blood, as she, groggy with staggering pain, pulls clumps of hair from her scalp then squeezes the clumps to have blood dribble between her fingers onto the tatami mat, is the kind of thing that makes the hair stand up on your neck. Once Oiwa is dead and a ghost, once Oume and her father have perished, this takes a bit different tack, having Oume's foster mother (Awa) fall in love with Iemon, moving in with him to keep him company, to nurse him as his personality disintegrates into haunted madness.

Another different slant is the most developed subplot involving Osode (Ikeuchi) and Yomoshichi (Hira). Yomoshichi returns after recovering from near death, and Osode is overjoyed to see him alive. Naosuke (Nakamura), who is living with her, can barely contain his feelings which sway from indignant anger to fear of discovery. Yomoshichi doesn't quite know what to think, vacillating from happiness at finding his true love to sexual insecurity as he puzzles at Osode's relationship with the older Naosuke to anger at Naosuke's viciously envious jibes (he doesn't know it was Naosuke who attacked him). Osode puts two-and-two together, recalling what frightened Takuetsu had hinted at earlier in the day when he'd spotted Oiwa's dredged-from-the-swamp kimono, Naosuke's guilty demeanor and now Yomoshichi's comments about a dream of Oiwa, and deduces Oiwa's been murdered. She becomes hysterical and runs to the door. Naosuke, seeing his chance to catch Yomoshichi off guard, lunges with his knife. But Yomoshichi has intercepted Osode, pulled her to him, and



Trapped, *The Crimson Bat*, 1964, #2 of 4.

the blade pierces her in the chest instead. She dies immediately. Yomoshichi draws his sword, his heart breaking into fury, chases Naosuke out into the yard and kills him.

Already possessed of a strange, off-kilter reality, Toyoda pulls out the stops towards the end as the temple where Iemon and Oume's foster mother are staying and the snowy rural area of the adjoining lake become a phantasmagorical wonderland of simultaneously beautiful/grotesque color. When the inevitable happens and Iemon mistakes his new woman for Oiwa, killing her, then follows Oiwa's ghost out onto the bridge across the lake, the film makes the final jump into totally baroque, surreal dreamworld. If only this would be released in the U.S. on video. How about it, Criterion? How about a double-feature disc set of Nakagawa's '59 version and this *Illusion of Blood*? If even Toho would release it on video. Stranger things have happened but I'm not going to hold my breath. ****(A Tokyo Elga Production/Toho Release) (No Tape)

1969 *Curse of the Ghost* (Yotsuya Kaidan — *Oiwa No Borei*) 93 min. Dir. Kazuo Mori w/ Kei Sato, Kazuko Inano, Yoshihiko Aoyama, Shoji Kobayashi, Kyoko Mikage, Sonosuke Sawamura
When I first saw this I wasn't all that impressed. However, on second and third viewings, I grew more and more enamored of its austere, pared-to-the-bone visual style. Something undoubtedly predicated by a low budget and diabolically hurried schedule, but metamorphosed in Mori's hands into a straight-ahead non-nonsense parable of self-betrayal and guilt. Mori turns liability into attribute, striving for simplicity in set-decoration and color scheme and an unrelentingly focused microscope on Kei Sato's grimly mean-spirited Iemon, a man hiding from his feelings, from any tenderness or love because that's not the samurai way — at least the way he's been taught. Iemon's betrayals, even more than in Nakagawa's or Toyoda's versions, are a function of the feudal-system-in-collapse in a microcosm.

Here Iemon and Oiwa are well-off when married at the beginning, but all too soon Oiwa's family clan is abolished. Her father goes from rich garments to poor brown muslin kimonos. Nevertheless he keeps his ideals and pride because it's all he has. Iemon hires thugs to put on a show, threatening Oume from a rich family so he can save her and curry favor. When his father-in-law witnesses Iemon paying off the ruffians behind a temple, the die is cast. Iemon

kills him and the machinery is set in motion. Kohei ends up as the anti-thesis of Iemon, a commoner well-educated, but sensitive and caring, not polluted by bushido and ambition. When Oiwa dies, it's Kohei who joins her being nailed on the other side of the door, not Taketsu. One eye-catching motif that Mori throws in after Oiwa and Kohei become ghosts, is the advent of flying aquamarine balls of fire, devil lights that whirl around Iemon, tormenting him. Because of Mori's more-straightforward-than-usual drive, this is probably one of the easiest versions to follow without subtitles. *** VHS (Japan)=Date!

1981 *Demonic Summer* — *Yotsuya Ghost Story* (*Masho No Natsu* — *Yotsuya Kaidan Yori*) 95 min. Dir. Yukio (Takao?) Ninagawa w/ Kenichi Hagihara, Keiko Sekine, Masako Natsume, Renji Ishibashi

A massively re-hauled version of the story with a self-deprecating humor (de-rigueur for just about any "serious" Japanese film between 1980 and 1991 — in other words a feeling of self-consciousness comes across, being ashamed of the culture and source material so it's made fun of instead of taken seriously). Fortunately, this is one of the few times I've seen such irreverent rearrangement of story elements work.

Hagihara plays a dissolute, manic depressive samurai whom you'd swear was drunk-on-his-ass even when he isn't. A decadent contingent of fringe-dwelling misfits continually congregate at the house where he lives with his common-law wife, Oiwa and their baby. When Iemon (Hagihara) and Naosuke (Ishibashi) commit their first murders, the two acts happen simultaneously within a hundred yards of each other behind separate woodpiles on a sunset-illuminated beach. Both are arguing with their victims, then begin delivering physical blows and before you know it, the men are dead. Emerging from behind their respective piles of lumber, they scare-the-hell out of each other. Each now has something on the other, so they arrange things to look as if the two men killed each other. Things continue at a seemingly normal pace, but the two "friends" slowly start to become unraveled inside.

Kohei is a fellow party animal that Iemon, in the presence of everyone else, decides to gag, tie up and throw into the cellar. Though Oiwa's the only kind, decent person, she's completely ineffectual, lacking in the self-esteem and confidence to ever challenge the insanity of her mate.

When the rich girl, Oume, first catches sight of Iemon, it's not through any chivalrous rescue of her. A self-centered, psychotic brat, she's just finished pitching a fit with a pair of scissors on her family's veranda and accidentally sees Iemon strolling down the busy street. Her parents are relieved that she's spotted someone she wants to marry and immediately make arrangements to find Iemon. Once this "good fortune" befalls Iemon, his entire coterie of "friends" frantically try to find ways of jumping on his coattails. Iemon cruelly relegates Oiwa to the role of "sister," still keeping her in the house with their child but with no more function than a housekeeper. She stoically bears it. But Oume, who at certain times is framed to resemble a demon, cannot tolerate Oiwa's presence. Iemon conspires with Takuetsu (a skinny young masseur that goes against the usual aging, overweight stereotype of the role) and Naosuke to do away with her.

Meanwhile, Oiwa's sister, Osode, has become a prostitute to help make ends meet. Naosuke, who's hopelessly in-love with her, is reduced to waiting next to a hole in the next room's paper wall while Osode, bored and restless goes through her routine. Oiwa finally starts feeling the poison Takuetsu/Iemon have been feeding her while out at a theater performance with Iemon and Oume. The Kabuki play coincidentally is a dead-ringer for *Yotsuya Kaidan*.

Dying, Oiwa ends up inspiring Iemon into a lunatic frenzy. First he slays Takuetsu, then,

seeing Oiwa's ghost, kills Oume and at last her parents. He tips over a lantern and sets the whole house ablaze. Yomoshichi has returned to find Osode living with Naosuke. The two men fight and Osode is accidentally killed. Overwrought with grief, Naosuke lets down his guard and is killed by Yomoshichi. Yomoshichi splits. Drunken with visions of ghosts, lemon crawls into Naosuke's darkened room, passes out between the corpses of his two friends whom he believes to be asleep. Yomoshichi awakens him the next morning. The two draw their swords, drag their brawl outside, trip down a steep sand dune (where they both comically nearly break their necks), and finally kill each other on the beach. A parting shot homes in on the ghost of disfigured Oiwa holding her baby, sitting amongst the blackened timbers and glowing embers of their destroyed house. ***VHS (Japan)=Shochiku.

1994 *Yotsuya Ghost Story — The Loyal 47 Ronin* (Yotsuya Kaidan — Chushingura Gaiden) Dir. Kinji Fukasaku w/ Koichi Sato, Hayaki Takaoka, Renji Ishibashi, Tsunehiko Watase, Masahiko Tsugawa, Eriko Watanabe, Takahiro Tamura, Hiroyuki Sanada.

Fukasaku, who made another version of Chushingura called *Fall of Ako Castle* (Akojo Danzetsu) (1978, 140 min. VHS (Japan)=Toei), blends the tale with the second-most filmed saga in Japan. Seeing the video box art and the ads in *Kinema Junpo* magazine (when it was first released last year), you get the impression it's more of a *Loyal 47 Ronin* film than the *Yotsuya Ghost Story*. Nevertheless, Fukasaku balances the two scenarios fairly well.

Sato plays lemon, who becomes a masterless ronin when his mentor and master, the young lord Asano is forced to commit *hara-kiri* after attacking Lord Kira (Takahiro Tamura) in the Pine Corridor of the Shogun's Edo castle. Although we see the other members of the clan methodically plan their revenge on Kira in various clandestine subterfuges, and although we're privy to head loyal retainer (Masahiko Tsugawa) faking a life of dissolution to throw Kira's spies off the track, it's lemon the camera concentrates on. lemon plays the *biwa* (guitar-like string instrument) and, for a time, performs for coins on the street with two fellow ronin. It's also part of the revenge plot for them to appear destitute. But, even though he was close to Asano, he begins to feel alienated from the idea of vengeance. He hires Oiwa (Takaoka), a young prostitute as a housekeeper, and she almost immediately falls in love with him.

Events quickly spiral downwards into an inferno of nightmarish happenings. A mad dog gets loose in the street, terrifying everyone in its path. It makes a beeline for lemon's house and ends up killing one of the older *Ako ronin* (several of the retainers are living there with lemon). Shortly thereafter, lemon rescues rich stranger, Oume,

from the usual band of villains, but his precious *biwa* is broken in half in the process. Oume is mute and barely sane, a demonic-appearing creature with rows of sharp little teeth and a kind of shimmering heat/haze aura around her. lemon, becoming for all intents and purposes bewitched, is ripe for a 'possessed' seduction having already lost all his ideals over the preceding months.

The poisoning of Oiwa occurs when Oume's monstrous maid approaches the lecherous peeping tom, Takuetsu, with a gold coin and bids him give Oiwa a potion (implying that it's an aphrodisiac). When the toxin takes effect, Oiwa goes into screaming convulsions, spewing blood from between her legs and developing the hideous facial lesions. She attacks Takuetsu but falls on her own knife. The returning lemon slays Takuetsu. Oume's father has some of Lord Kira's men help lemon nail the bodies to a door and throw it in the lake.

lemon's wedding to Oume is an overt panorama of crossing over into a demon world. Oume does a dance before a mesmerized lemon, at times exhibiting evidence that she's a dreaded fox ghost. Unknown to lemon, various members of Lord Kira's contingent of bodyguards/samurais preside over the celebration from the shadows. They're given a corpse-like, bluish cast to their features, bestowing a melodramatic abandonment of ambiguity so we'll be certain that these people are directly linked to hell. That night the other remaining 47 ronin are preparing for their attack on Kira's mansion.

Before dawn, lemon has done the requisite slaying of Oume and family, mistaking them for Oiwa's ghost. Hysterical handmaidens alert Lord Kira's men who search for lemon. They find him huddled in a dark corner in his home and extort help from him against the *Ako* contingent, forcing him to kill the *Ako* head retainer. lemon goes to Tsugawa's to kill, draws his blade but is himself slain by his *Ako* brothers. He becomes a ghost, too, and with Oiwa observes Tsugawa leading the loyal samurai into Kira's stronghold.

This is where I found some of the weakest moments of the film. Oiwa is given supernatural, superhuman powers to blast various squads of Kira's samurai, intervening when certain *Ako* clan avengers are endangered. Fukasaku really destroys the balance between the ethereal spirit world and the violent world of physical humanity. It's unexplainably jarring in what otherwise is a very good film. These effects, obviously achieved through digital computer work, have a different look and have not been integrated particularly well into the "normal" fight footage. Also, the whole climactic massacre seems hurried, the pacing destroyed. Anyway — once the clan avengers have beheaded Kira and are disappearing down the street, some of them gaze back as if they actually see lemon and Oiwa forlornly standing there at the mansion's gates. ***VHS(Japan)=Shochiku.

That's it for coverage of the *Yotsuya Ghost Story* (Yotsuya Kaidan). Here's a listing of some other *kaidan*. Because of limitations of space and time, this represents perhaps only 35 to 40% of the *kaidan*s filmed in Japan.

1953 *Ugetsu* (Ugetsu Monogatari or Stories of Moonlight and Rain) 96 min. Dir. Kenji Mizoguchi w/ Masayuki Mori, Machiko Kyo, Kinuyo Tanaka (see issue #13 of *Cult Movies*, Part 2 of this article under Mizoguchi) VHS/Laser(Japan)=Daiel; American subtitled VHS=Home Vision, Laser=Criterion.

1953 *Ghost Cat of Arima Palace* (Kaibyō Arima Goten) 49 min. Dir. Ryohhei Arai w/ Takako Irie, Kotaro Bando, Michiko Ai VHS (Japan)=Daiel

1954 *Terrible Ghost Cat of Okazaki* (Kaidan Okazaki Sodo) 86 min. Dir. Bin Kado w/ Takako Irie, Kotaro Bando, Shosaku Sugiyama VHS(Japan)=Daiel

1955 *Peonies and Stone Lanterns* (Botandoro)



The Friendly Killer (Nobori Ryu Tekka Hada), 1969.

Dir. Akira Nobuchi w/ Chiyonosuke Azuma, Yuriko Tashiro (Toei) (No Tape)

1956 *Spy's Secret Scroll — Phantom Castle* (Onmitsu Hicho — Maboroshi Jo) 99 min. Dir. Ryo Hagihara w/ Ryutaro Otomo, Eitaro Shindo (Toei) (No Tape)

1957 *The Depths* (Kaidan Kasane Ga Fuchi aka *Ghost of Kasane Swamp* aka *The Masseur's Curse*) 65 min. Dir. Nobuo Nakagawa w/ Katsuko Wakasugi, Tetsuro Tamba, Takashi Wada, Noriko Kitazawa (Shintocho) VHS (Japan)=Kurari (Clarion)

1957 *Necromancy* (aka *Ghost Cat of Yonaki Swamp* aka *Kaibyō Yonaki Numa*) 89 min. Dir. Kazuhiko Tasaka w/ Shintaro Katsu, Toshio Chiba, Tokiko Mita, Takako Irie VHS (Japan)=Daiel

1958 *Ghost Cat Wall of Hatred* (Kaibyō Noroi No Kabe or *Cursed Wall of the Ghost Cat*) 88 min. Dir. Kenji Misumi w/ Shintaro Katsu, Yoko Uraji, Mieko Kondo.

Katsu plays Takeuchi, a fencing instructor, whose sister, Shino, is governess to Lord Maeda's son. A widower, Lord Maeda proposes to Shino, but she's in love with someone else. She meets her lover in the castle mausoleum. They're attacked by Maeda retainers who are, in reality, intent on usurping power. They kill Shino, but her lover, Atsumi, escapes. The two main villains wall up her body as well as a live cat that keeps scratching at them. Takeuchi gives refuge to Atsumi. The villains bring in an exorcist to get rid of the cat ghost that's attacking people as well as cast a spell to make Maeda's ill son/heir recover. But they actually have the priest place a curse on the boy. Events escalate until the two villains are discovered, the boy heir's made well and Shino receives a proper burial. VHS (Japan)=Daiel

1958 *Black Cat Mansion* (Borei Kaibyō Yashiki) 69 min. Dir. Nobuo Nakagawa w/ Toshio Hosokawa, Ryuzaburo Nakamura, Midori Chikama, Fumiko Migata (Shintocho) (No Tape)

1959 *The Three Treasures* (Nippon Tanjo) Dir. Hiroshi Inagaki w/ Toshio Mifune Not exactly a "kaidan" but certainly in the fantasy/period piece realm. Remade as *Yamato Takeru* (and not nearly as good) in 1994 by Toho. (see issue #13 of *Cult Movies*, Part 2 of this article, section on H. Inagaki). VHS/Laser (Japan)=Toho.

1959 *Ghost From The Pond* (Kaidan Hitotsu-Me Jizo) 66 min. Dir. Kinoshita Fukuda w/ Tomisaburo Wakayama, Shinobu Chihara, Hiromi Hanazono (Toei) (No Tape)

1959 *Ghost of Kagami Swamp* (Kaidan Kagami Ga Fuchi) 61 min. Dir. Masaki Mori w/ Noriko Kitazawa, Masaburo Date (Shintocho) VHS (Japan)=Kurari (Clarion)

1960 *Legend of Kasane Swamp* (Kaidan Kasane Ga Fuchi aka *The Masseur's Curse*) 90 min. Dir. Kimiyoshi Yasuda w/ Ganjiro (continued)



Quick Draw Okatsu, 1969.



Yotsuya Ghost Story — Loyal 47 Ronin, 1994.

Nakamura, Yataro Kitagami, Tokiko Mita, Yoko Uraji VHS (Japan)=Dale

1960 *Invisible Goblin (Tomei Tengu)* 73 min. Dir. Mitsuo Hirotsu w/ Yutaka Nakamura, Mieko Kondo, Chitose Maki, Ryuzo Shimada, Shinobu Araki Remade in 1970 by Yoshiyuki Kuroda as *Invisible Swordsman (Tomei Kenshi)*. Reformer a la Kurama Tengu is invisible and terrorizing various corrupt officials. **1/2 VHS (Japan)=Dale

1961 *Ghost Story of Kakui Street (Kaidan Kakui Dori)* 78 min. Dir. Kazuo Mori w/ Eiji Funakoshi, Kazuhiko Kobayashi, Matasaburo Tamba VHS (Japan)=Dale

1962 *Love, Thy Name Be Sorrow (Koi Ya Koi Nasuna Koi aka Love Not Again aka The Mad Fox)* 109 min. Dir. Tomu Uchida w/ Hashizo Okawa, Michiko Saga, Sumiko Hadaka Okawa falls in-love with a benevolent fox-ghost who becomes human with tragic results. Supposedly a beautiful and moving fantasy/love story. (Toei) (No Tape)

1962 *Ghost Story of Stone Lanterns and Crying In The Night (Kaidan Yonaki Dori)* 73 min. Dir. Kazuhiko Tasaka w/ Ganjiro Nakamura, Kazuhiko Kobayashi, Reiko Fujiwara, Hiroshi Nawa VHS (Japan)=Dale

1963 *Ghost Story of Devil's Fire Swamp (Kaidan Onibi No Numa)* 78 min. Dir. Bin Kado w/ Tomisaburo Wakayama (aka Kenzaburo Jo), Mieko Kondo, Matasaburo Tamba, Kazuhiko Kobayashi VHS (Japan)=Dale

1964 *Kwaidan (Kaidan aka Studies of Strange Things)* 183 min. Dir. Masaki Kobayashi Composed of four stories. Kobayashi painted many of the surreally beautiful sets/backdrops himself. Also Toru Takemitsu composed the soundtrack before the film was made and many scenes were shot playing the music in the background. If you haven't seen this, you're missing a truly gorgeous treat for the eyes — a feast for the visual senses equivalent to gorging yourself on your fave foods but without any gastrointestinal repercussions.

"Black Hair" (*Kurokami*) w/ Rentaro Mikuni, Michiyo Aratama, Misako Watanabe, Kenjiro Ishiyama. A poor samurai is offered wealth and position if he'll leave the wife he's in love with to marry a rich official's daughter. Tortured though he is and despite his wife's humble pleas, he decides to take the offer. Years pass and when next we see him he is bitterly unhappy, constantly humiliated and taunted by his vain, cold shrew of a wife. Realizing he's left behind what's most important, he abandons his rich house and

travels back to his previous home. It's late at night when he returns to a rundown, ramshackle ruin that's surrounded by an overgrown yard. Surprisingly enough, he finds his beloved inside, serenely working her spinning wheel. She greets him warmly, overjoyed at his presence. He's beside himself with joy, much of it relief that he wasn't too late. They go to sleep in each others' arms. However, next morning he awakens to discover the house's insides are as dilapidated as the exterior and the thing he holds in his arms is a skeleton with long, lustrous black hair. Horrified, he stumbles to his feet. The floor is rotten and keeps giving way beneath him as the tendrils of hair reach out to caress him.

"Woman of the Snow" (*Yuki Onna*) w/ Tatsuya Nakadai, Keiko Kishi, Mariko Okada, Jun Hamamura. A young and old woodcutter become lost in the forest when a devastating blizzard catches them by surprise. They take shelter in a hut. During the night, the younger man awakens to find a woman in white crouching over his companion, breathing freezing air into him and sucking life out of him. The ghost catches him watching and is so taken with his handsome countenance, she agrees to spare him if he promises to never tell another soul. The next day he makes it back to the village. This sequence, with giant eyes staring down from the sky will be indelibly etched on your retinas. Shortly thereafter the young man meets a woman who resembles the snow lady. They fall in love and marry. Several years and a couple of children later, villagers remark on her beauty, kindness and seemingly perpetual youth. That night, it snows, and the young man is moved to tell a strange story that happened to him. He relates the experience. Suddenly, the countenance of his wife changes, and he recognizes the snow spirit. She reprimands him for breaking his promise, genuinely regretful that things must end — the reason she'd spared him was she'd fallen in love with him that freezing night in the hut. She can't bring herself to kill him because the children would suffer, but she assures him he'll never ever see her again. With that, she wafts out of the door.

"Hoichi, The Earless" (*Mimi Nashi Hoichi*) w/ Katsuo (Kazuo) Nakamura, Takashi Shimura, Ganjiro Nakamura, Kunie Tanaka, Tetsuro Tamba, Yoichi Hayashi, Rentaro Mikuni, Ichiro Nakatani. Near the shore where the Heike clan perished in a sea battle hundreds of years ago, is a temple. Hoichi (Nakamura), a young blind priest talented at singing old songs and playing the *biwa*, resides there. One night he's approached by a samurai (Tamba) who bids him secretly accompany him to the encampment of his lord, a descendant of the great Heike clan. Once at the destination we see that it's a ghostly court of noblemen/women. Hoichi senses something strange but doesn't guess the truth. Night after night, they drag Hoichi off to sing songs of that last great battle. My fondest memories of the film are the flashbacks of the battle — the Heikes on long flat boats sailing through the fog and attacking their enemy. After losing, the Heike wives, the prominent clanswomen jump to their deaths with their babes-in-arms, disappearing into the mist that blankets the blood red sea.

One night the head temple priest (Shimura) has two attendants follow Hoichi. Petrified with fear though they are, they manage to drag him back to the temple. The priest explains that Hoichi's hosts are spirits, that the noble encampment is, in reality, a graveyard, and that if he continues to entertain them, they'll eventually rip him limb-from-limb. The priests paint his body with sacred text to render him invisible to the ghosts. At the appointed time the following evening, he sits there perfectly still, not answering when the ghost calls out to him. Unfortunately the assistant had forgotten to paint Hoichi's ears. The samurai sees them and fig-

ures he should bring something back to his lord so the lord will know he attempted to find Hoichi. Miraculously, Hoichi remains mute as the demon tears off his ears. The next day the monks minister to him, and Shimura blames himself for not double checking to make sure the job had been done correctly. Hoichi's reputation grows due to the story, and he becomes rich as noblemen travel from far and wide to hear him sing.

The last story is "In A Cup Of Tea" (*Cha Wan No Naka*) w/ Kanemon Nakamura, Jun Tazaki, Noboru Nakaya, Haruko Sugimura, Kei Sato, Ganjiro Nakamura. A writer attempts to figure out the ending for the story of a man who sees a strange face every time he looks into a cup of tea. The image of this phantom eventually torments him full-size in the guise of several ghost samurai. The climax has the writer's publisher come to visit, but he finds the writer not at home. He reads what's on the man's worktable and is impressed. He then goes into the main room and approaches a pot of water on the floor. The writer's face peers mournfully back at him, his spirit caught in the water's reflection. The publisher screams. The End.

This is a must-see film. The only drawback is some viewers may not be able to tolerate the slow pacing. I took a couple of friends (literate, intelligent people) to see *Kwaidan* at a revival theater in 1982, but we had to leave after "Hoichi, The Earless" because they could not abide the slow pace. It hadn't bothered me at all; in fact, it hadn't even occurred to me that the movie might move a tad slow for some folks. Be forewarned.

***American subtitled VHS=HOME VISION Laser=Criterion (It's not out on tape or laser in Japan!)

1964 *Oni-Baba (Devil Witch aka The Hole)* 104 min. Writ./Dir. Kaneto Shindo w/ Nobuko Otowa, Kei Sato, Jitsuko Yoshimura, Jukichi Uno, Tatsuya Nakadai. A mother and daughter-in-law make their living during the great clan wars (1500s) by waylaying retreating, wounded samurais, finishing them off, then stealing their weapons and armor. A scruffy young man (Sato) who had gone off to battle with the younger woman's husband / older woman's son, returns to tell them the fellow died in combat. The young girl drifts into an affair with the man. The mother is bitterly jealous and uses a demon mask to scare the couple when they're having sex at night. The scheme backfires when the mask becomes stuck. The mother has to tell the daughter it was her all along and not a devil. The daughter tries to pull off the mask. Finally she manages to split it open, but it's disfigured the mother's face (as if acid had been poured on her flesh). The mother can't understand her daughter-in-law's fright and chases after her through the fields in the darkness. There's a bottomless pit where the two have thrown the dead samurais' corpses. When they reach it, the younger woman leaps. The scene freezes frame as the mother jumps, is caught frozen in the air above the hole. ***1/2

American subtitled VHS=Cinemateque Collection (?) VHS(Japan)=Toho

1964 *The Spying Sorceress (Kunoichi Gesho)* Dir. Sadao Nakajima w/ ? (Toei) (No Tape)

1966 *The Magic Serpent (Kairyu Dai Kessen aka Grand Duel In Magic aka Great Battle Of The Giant Dragons)* 86 min. Dir. Tetsuya Yamauchi w/ Hiroki Matsukata, Ryutaro Otomo, Tomoko Ogawa, Bin Amatsu, Nobuo Kaneko Bin Amatsu and Ryutaro Otomo are villains who usurp the throne. They manage to assassinate the *daimyo* and his wife, but the little boy prince flees with the help of a loyal retainer. Otomo is a black magician who changes into a dragon as the fugitives row across the nearby lake. A giant eagle (really an old wizard) suddenly descends and scratches the dragon's face, which enables the little prince to escape. He's subsequently brought

up by the wizard (Kaneko) in the mountains and grows up to be a strapping young hero (Matsukata).

When Matsukata intervenes to save some helpless people, Amatsu and Otomo realize that he's the noble heir they've been searching for all these years. Matsukata falls in love with Otomo's daughter, who doesn't take after her father. After many special effects scenes, *ninja* attacks and swordplay, Matsukata slays Amatsu. Once again Otomo becomes the dragon. Matsukata conjures up a giant, fire-breathing toad. The two monsters do battle, destroying the lakeside castle. The princess uses a ring her grandmother had given her to summon a giant spider which wraps the dragon in a spider web. Coerced into resuming his human form, Otomo is forced to fight Matsukata on the shore with swords, and Otomo perishes. Prince Matsukata and the girl fly off into the sunrise on a giant eagle.

Despite being aimed at kids (with an occasionally annoying children's song), the film holds up as an action packed fantasy/samurai thriller. The special effects and miniature work are more than adequate for the time period. This was released in dubbed English directly to American TV, however it's never received an authorized U.S. video release. VHS (Japan)=Toei Laser (Japan)=Toei (out-of-print)

1966 *Majin, Monster of Terror* (*Dai Majin aka The Great Man Demon*) 84 min. Dir. Kimiyoshi Yasuda Special Effects Dir. Yoshiyuki Kuroda w/ Miwa Takada, Jun Fujimaki, Ryutaro Gomi, Tatsuo Endo ***#1 VHS/Laser (Japan)=Dai/I/Pioneer

1966 *Return of Giant Majin* (*Dai Majin Ikaru or The Great Man Demon's Anger*) 79 min. Dir. Kenji Misumi Spec. Eff. Dir. Yoshiyuki Kuroda w/ Shiho Fujimura, Kojiro Hongo, Asao Uchida, Tara Fujimura ***1/2 #2 VHS/Laser (Japan)=Dai/I/Pioneer

1966 *Majin Strikes Again* (*Dai Majin Gyakushu or The Great Man Demon's Counterattack*) 87 min. Dir. Kazuo Mori Spec. Eff. Dir. Yoshiyuki Kuroda w/ Hideki Ninomiya, Shinji Hori, Toru Abe, Hiroshi Nawa ***#3 VHS/Laser (Japan)=Dai/I/Pioneer

This trilogy concerns the great man demon, or *Dai Majin*, and how it from time to time is awakened from its slumber as a giant stone idol to punish blasphemers, rampaging until the powerful evildoers who are victimizing the poor are destroyed. The catch is things have to get really bad before Majin will come to life. So all manner of atrocities are perpetrated on the helpless before redemption can be achieved.

The first film sees two noble children escape when their benevolent father, the reigning lord, and mother are deposed, then murdered by traitorous subordinates. They grow to maturity in the mountains. Once they're young adults (Takada and Fujimaki), they attempt to save the province from the wicked ruler (Gomi) and his sadistic right-hand man (Endo). The princess is about to give herself up to keep Gomi from executing her captured brother when Majin awakens and attacks the scoundrel's compound, stomping on soldiers, pulling down buildings and finally nailing Gomi to a wall with a giant spike.

The second film sees evil government forces using villagers for forced labor. Knowing that the people pray to the stone image of Majin on a tiny nearby island, the rulers resolve to blow it up. A young woman (Fujimura) tries to stop them and is nearly killed in the explosion. After much villager persecution, Majin awakens, emerging from and parting the sea (apparently after piecing himself back together with the aid of a ball of white energy that has descended from the heavens). He rescues Fujimura, Hongo and others who have been crucified (tied with ropes, not nailed). The panicking evil ruler tries to sail away, but Majin follows. The frightened man climbs the mast, becomes tangled in ropes and strangles, crucified to the sails as the boat burns.

Fujimura's tears falling in the lake cause Majin to dissolve and return to the netherworld.

In the third tale, a band of children (amazingly not obnoxious) traverse forest and mountain to reach a distant plateau where the stone god is rumored to rest. Most of their parents are being held as slaves at the local lord's sulphur mine. It takes the death of a couple of the children and more violations of Majin's territory by the lord's men to get him angry enough to wake up and accomplish the good deed of thrashing the evildoers. The local tyrant (Abe) is thrown by Majin into a bubbling sulphur pit, the same pit into which the villain had thrown rebellious slaves.

The special effects in all three films are very impressive, especially when you consider the budgets. In fact, I'd say that Yoshiyuki Kuroda is quite underrated. He's at least the equal of the late Eiji Tsubaraya, and, in some scenes from these films, surpasses him. The score for all three pictures represents, next to his *Godzilla* themes, Akira Ifukube's most recognizable work, and the music is uniformly excellent.



Lefty Pencer, 1969.

1968 *The Cursed Pond* (*Kaibyō Noroi No Numa or Cat Ghost Of The Cursed Swamp*) 87 min. Dir. Yoshihiro Ishikawa w/ Ryohei Uchida, Kotaro Satomi, Kyoko Mikage, Yuriko Mishima, Hiroshi Nawa. I'd love to see this as Mikage portrays what seems like, from the stills, the sexiest cat-ghost in any of these cat-ghost films. The photos show her with a gleefully maniacal smile, toying with a decapitated head and licking an amputated foot. (Toei) (No Tape)

1968 *Kuroneko* (*Yabu No Naka No Kuroneko or Black Cat In The Forest*) 99 min. Writ./Dir. Kaneto Shindo w/ Kichijemon Nakamura, Nobuko Otowa, Kei Sato, Kiwako Taichi, Rokko Taura. Just as amazing but not as well known as Shindo's *Oni Baba*. An older woman and daughter-in-law living in a rural hut are raped and slaughtered by a passing band of animalistic mercenaries. They burn the house as they leave. In the dying embers, a black cat licks at the blood seeping from the two women's still intact, untouched-by-fire bodies. Several years pass, and samurai traveling alone through the nearby woods are being found slain, their throats ripped out. The two women have been transformed into vampire cat-ghosts, dedicated to the absolute eradication of any and every samurai who passes through their domain.

The brutal local warlord (Sato) summons his best man (Nakamura) to find the monsters and

destroy them. Much to both Nakamura's and the ghost-women's surprise, Nakamura is the long-lost husband of the younger woman and the son of the older one. He doesn't recognize them immediately nor they him. They're masquerading as rich lonely widows, desirous of male companionship and he, too, has changed in his appearance, now a respected samurai with beautiful clothes, swords and horse. The two ghosts go through agonizing tribulation, trying to resolve to kill him because he's a samurai but reluctant because they both still love him. Having fallen in love with the young woman, Nakamura nearly goes insane when he realizes who the two really are and how they had perished in his absence. The wife cannot bring herself to kill him, and she is thus banished from the land of the living. The mother explains this to her son, and why she must kill him. The son manages to exorcise her spirit but is found dead the following morning. There are no further ghostly disturbances in the area. ***1/2

VHS (Japan)=Toho

1968 *Curse of the Blood* (*Kaidan Zankoku Monogatari or Cruel Ghost Legend*) 88 min. Dir. Kazuo Hase w/ Masakazu Tamura, Yusuke Kawazu, Rokko Taura, Hiroko Sakurai, Nobuo Kaneko, Masumi Harukawa, Saeda Kawaguchi. Three part revolving narrative that begins with a poor samurai killing the masseur who'd loaned him money. The dying masseur curses the samurai and his children. First the samurai dies after having murdered his wife. Then his first son's beloved dies and the young man goes mad with grief, embarking on a life of crime. The second son falls in love with another woman and kills his current girlfriend. The masseur's ghost appears to him and, when he tries to kill it, he accidentally kills his new woman instead.

This second son next discovers the head of his dead brother who has finally been caught and executed for his crimes. It's revealed to him that the dead woman with whom his brother had been in-love was actually the daughter of the masseur. He then comes across the mother of his latest dead girlfriend. She tells him that the girl was actually his half-sister. Horrified, he kills her and then himself. The curse is complete. Confused? Adapted from a novel "*Kaidan Rui Ga Fuchi*" by Renzaburo Shibata (creator of *Kyoshiro Nemuri*), this quite similar to the traditional "*Kaidan Kasane Ga Fuchi*" legend. VHS (Japan)=Shochiku

1968 *Ghost Story of Peonies and Stone Lanterns* (*Botandora aka Bride From Hades*) 89 min. Dir. Satsuo Yamamoto w/ Kojiro Hongo, Mayumi Ogawa, Miyoko Akaza, Michiko Otsuka, Ko Nishimura, Takashi Shimura. Hongo is a samurai intent on divorcing his loveless spouse, refusing to stay in an unhappy marriage despite the fact both her and his family will disown him. He moves to a small town and teaches school to the poor village children. However he remains lonely.

It's the time of the Obon Festival (Festival of the Dead) when paper lanterns are lit representing the souls of deceased friends and relatives then floated down the river. Yamamoto conveys the mood of a warm summer night with everything he shows, with the sounds of the happy children and the buzzing insects, and an excellent moody score by Sei Ikeno. Two women appear to Hongo and introduce themselves. He's out with his students and merely says hello. But he's haunted by the younger woman. For the next several nights the women come to visit him at his house. Nishimura, Hongo's servant — a harmless but not altogether innocent fellow who's involved with the local criminal element — tells the local priest, Shimura.

Shimura realizes the two are ghosts who are taking advantage of Hongo's loneliness. Told the next day, Hongo, at first, refuses to believe it. The priest explains that if he keeps on seeing

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the two, they'll eventually drain him of life, and he'll die. Shimura and his helpers from the village paste sacred text on the doors, windows, any cracks or openings in the house so the ghosts will be repelled that night.

But Nishimura and his girlfriend are approached by the ghosts instead and told they'll be paid a fortune in gold if they remove the sacred papers from Hongo's cottage. They agree. Going to the cemetery, they find the graves of the two women and dig up a small cache of gold that's been buried there. Meanwhile, the two spirits enter Hongo's place. At first he's terrified, but then his loneliness and love for the younger ghost overcomes his fear. He embraces her. The next morning he's discovered by the priest and villagers, dead with the skeleton of a woman in his arms. Nishimura and girlfriend are already on the outskirts of the village. Greedy, one suggests to the other that there was probably more gold buried in the grave. They return to the graveyard and almost immediately come upon more gold. But this gold has been buried by thieves who coincidentally are just returning to recover their loot. They murder Nishimura and the woman, leaving them sprawled on the graves. That night the whole village turns out in force to bury and honor their young samurai teacher.

***1/2 VHS (Japan)=Daiel

1968 *100 Monsters (Yokai Hyaku Monogatari or Story of 100 Ghosts)* 79 min. Dir. Kimiyoshi Yasuda Special Effects: Yoshituki Kuroda w/ Jun Fujimaki, Miwa Takada, Mikiko Tsubouchi, Ryutaro Gomi A *yakuza* clan takes over a local temple, intent on turning it into a brothel despite the protests of the villagers. On opening night, they have a celebration, calling in a storyteller to relate the "Hundred Monster Collection." The man tells a few stories, a couple of which are dramatized in the film. Afterwards, the blasphemous *yakuza* boss neglects to have the exorcism read, something necessary to keep real ghosts and monsters from appearing. From then on the brothel is haunted by the ghosts. The boss, himself, mistakes his right hand man for a monster and slays him, then falls on his own sword.

A young samurai of the village (Fujimaki) goes to kill the local magistrate (Gomi) who's allowed corruption into the town. But he sees the magistrate being tormented by monstrous apparitions which causes the corrupt official to kill himself. The ghosts then leave the village. This is probably one of the most entertaining horror films to ever come out of Japan and captures perfectly, much as the same as *KWAIDAN*, that strange ambience and atmosphere of Japanese supernatural fiction. An excellent score by Chumei Watanabe adds immeasurably to the whole undertaking. ***1/2 VHS/Laser (Japan)=Daiel/Pioneer

1968 *Big Ghost War (Yokai Dai Senso aka Spook Warfare)* 78 min. Dir. Yoshituki Kuroda w/ Yoshihiko Aoyama, Akane Kawazaki, Asao Uchida. A great bloodsucking creature called Daimon that once ruled over Babylon comes to Japan and takes over the body of the local governor. The man who had once been kind and gentle has been transformed into a vicious tyrant. His daughter and retainers don't know what to make of his sudden change. A local water-spirit — that looks like a cross between a frog, a duck and a green devil — recognizes the governor for what he is, Daimon. He first tries to do battle with the evil spirit himself. This part is played for comedy and actually is fairly amusing. When the water-imp understands Daimon is way too powerful he calls in all his ghost and spirit friends to help rid the land of this foreign invader. It takes a while, but finally, with the help of some humans, they eventually destroy Daimon. ***VHS/Laser=Daiel/Pioneer

1968 *Woman of the Snow (Kaidan Yukijoro aka Yukionna aka The Snow Woman)* 80 min. Dir.

Tokuzo Tanaka w/ Shihō Fujimura, Akira Ishihama, Machiko Hasegawa, Taketoshi Naito, Fujio Suga Basically the same story as the Snow Woman tale of *KWAIDAN*, expended to feature-length. From what I've read quite effective in it's own right. VHS (Japan)=Daiel

1969 *Along With Ghosts (Tokaido Obake Dochū or Tokaido Highway Ghost Convention)* 78 min. Dir. Kimiyoshi Yasuda Special Effects: Yoshituki Kuroda w/ Kojiro Hongo, Ryutaro Gomi, Rokko Toura, Bokuzen Hidari. A follow-up to *100 Monsters* and *Big Ghost War*. Hongo plays a decent samurai who finds himself helping a couple of children being pursued by an evil *yakuza* clan. The kids have a document signed by their slain grandfather that will cost the villains much money if it falls into the wrong hands. Along the way, various ghosts and goblins help fight against the bad men. *** VHS/Laser (Japan)=Daiel/Pioneer

1969 *Portrait of Hell (Jigoku Hen or Hell Screener)* 91 min. Dir. Shiro Toyoda w/ Tatsuya Nakadai, Kinno Suke Nakamura, Yoko Naito, Shun Oide. A Korean artist (Nakadai) living in Japan under



Red Peony Gambler — Death to the Wicked, 1970.

the rule of a boorish, uncultured tyrant (Nakamura) is forced to paint pictures of paradise. However, all the artist sees around him is misery and horror caused by the dictator. These pictures anger the lord, and when he sees the artist's beautiful daughter for the first time, he takes her by force to be his mistress. The artist strikes a bargain with the lord that if he can paint a picture of hell the lord likes, the girl will be returned. The artist asks for a carriage to be burned in the castle yard so he'll have a model for the portrait.

But the lord has chained the daughter inside the carriage and asserts he'll burn her alive if the artist doesn't apologize for his continuously rebellious and insulting behavior. The artist is a stubborn man, and, not believing that the lord would burn the girl because he's in-love with her, calls his bluff and refuses. The lord is just as proud. Never guessing that the artist would refuse, he realizes he has to now go through with his threat or lose face before his entire court. He orders the carriage set alight. The daughter is consumed in flames.

Having gone mad, the artist paints a picture of the lord in the carriage burning to death, has it delivered, then hangs himself. When the lord sees the painting, he, too, loses his mind, imagining that the fire has jumped from the picture to the walls and floor around him. He falls into the inferno of hell. *** VHS (Japan)=Toho

1969 *The Haunted Castle (Hiroku Kaibyoden or Story of the Ghost Cat's Secret)* 83 min. Dir. Tokuzo Tanaka w/ Kojiro Hongo, Naomi Kobayashi, Mitsuyo Kamei, Rokko Toura, Akane Kawazaki. In 1730, Lord Nabeshima killed the former lord of the Saga clan. The murdered lord's sister, Sayo, committed suicide as a result. Her favorite cat then lapped up her blood, attaining

supernatural powers through transference of her soul. A loyal samurai (Hongo) tries to track down the cat ghost that seems to be indiscriminately killing people in the castle. The ghost possesses Lady Otoyō (Kobayashi), Nabeshima's favorite mistress. Eventually Hongo discovers the origin of the ghost, exposes the murder and kills the demonic Otoyō. VHS (Japan)=Daiel

1970 *The Masseur's Curse (Kaidan Kasane Ga Fuchi aka Ghostly Depths of Kasane aka Ghost Story Of Kasane Swamp)* 82 min. Dir. Kimiyoshi Yasuda w/ Ritsū Ishiyama, Maya Kitajima, Reiko Kasahara, Ryuko Mizugami, Mitsuko Tanaka, Kenjiro Ishiyama, Akane Kawazaki Much the same story as *Curse of the Blood* (see above). A samurai murders the masseur who loaned him money, then his own wife. Tortured by ghosts, he kills himself. His mistress steals his money. When the samurai's son, Shingaro, returns home from training, he learns of the death of both his parents.

One of the masseur's daughters has become a whore and falls in love with Shingaro, but kills herself when she discovers who he is. The masseur's other daughter then also falls in love with him, but is disfigured with boiling water by one of her business enemies. A worker in the business begins an affair with Shingaro. The disfigured woman becomes insanely jealous, and Shingaro murders her. He runs away with his new girl, but they become hopelessly lost in the swamp where his father had disposed of the masseur's body.

I haven't seen this, but it has the reputation of being one of Daiel's goriest productions. Yasuda's earlier version made in 1960 and Nakagawa's made in 1957 are both available on video. (Daiel) (No Tape)

1970 *Invisible Swordsman (Tomei Kenshi)* 78 min. Dir. Yoshituki Kuroda w/ Osamu Shai, Hachiro Oka, Kiyoshi Nishikawa

A remake of 1960's *Invisible Goblin (Tomei Tengu)*. (Daiel) (No Tape)

1970 *Blind Woman's Curse (Kaidan Nobori Ryu aka Tattooed Swordsman aka Haunted Life of A Dragon-Tattooed Lass aka Rising Dragon Ghost Story)* 85 min. Dir. Teruo Ishii w/ Meiko Kaji, Hoki Tokuda, Makoto Sato, Ryohel Uchida, Toru Abe, Yoshi Kato (see "Female Samurai" section in this article under *Rising Dragon* series) VHS (Japan)=Nikkatsu

1972 *Sex Story of Peonies and Stone Lanterns (Seidan Botandoro)* Dir. Chusei Sone w/ Setsuko Ogawa, Fusatomi Hara, Miki Hayashi, Hajime Tanimoto Remake of the famous period ghost story done in the soft-core *Roman Porno* style Nikkatsu pioneered in the seventies. (Nikkatsu) (TAPE?)

1975 *Under the Cherry Blossoms (Sakura No Mori No Mankai No Shita)* 95 min. Dir. Masahiro Shinoda Tomisaburo Wakayama, Shima Iwashita, Hiroko Isayama, Ko Nishimura. Wakayama is a notorious bandit living in the forest. He waylays a noble couple traveling through his territory, killing the husband and abducting the beautiful wife. From the very start she calls the shots, making Wakayama carry her on his back, then arriving at his mountain hideout, making him kill his other wives. Tiring of their debauchery in the wilderness, she has him take her to the city. There she has him decapitate various rich personages, bringing back their heads to keep in her collection. He quickly grows weary of this butchery and begs her to return with him to the flowering cherry trees of his home. Finally getting her to agree, he once again carries her on his back.

As they traverse the blossoming cherry grove, a strange transformation occurs, and he's able to see her as she really is, a hideous demon witch. She tries to strangle him, but he manages to throw her to the ground and run her through with his sword. As she dies, she disappears into the mounds of falling cherry blossoms. Even though he's killed her, Wakayama becomes

more frightened than before at his aloneness. Slowly he disappears too. Along with *Pale Flower* (Kawaita Hana) and *Banished Orin* (Hanare Gozoe Orin), my favorite film by Shinoda. *** VHS (Japan)=Toho

1979 *Demon Pond* (Yasha Ga Ike) 124 min. Dir. Masahiro Shinoda w/ Tomasaburo Bando, Go Kato, Tsutomu Yamazaki. In 1910 a school-teacher journeys to a remote area of Japan to see the Demon Pond. The area, though seemingly lush and fertile, is in the midst of a serious drought. The people won't take water from the Demon Pond on the other side of the mountain due to its haunted status. The teacher (Yamazaki) meets a young woman, Yuki (Bando playing a female role) who lives in a cottage with her husband (Go Kato). They both guard the pond. It turns out Kato is Yamazaki's long-lost friend who'd disappeared many years before when traveling in the same area.

Kato had befriended an old priest who was responsible for ringing the giant bell beside the cottage once at sunrise and once at sunset to keep the pond from overflowing its banks and flooding the surrounding countryside. A legend proclaims a fairy princess and her entourage of elves, goblins and fishmen live at the bottom of the lake, and the ringing of the bell is the only way to keep them contained. Many centuries before the spirits had promised to remain imprisoned there if the villagers always remembered to ring the bell at the two appointed times of day. The priest had died just as Kato was going to return home from his vacation. Initially he'd been going to leave anyway, but his devotion to the old priest and his growing affection for the young girl, Yuki, had made him stay.

Yamazaki asks to see the pond, which takes a couple of hours to reach. While hiking there in the moonlight, he begs Kato to return with him to his scholarly life in the city. Kato refuses, knowing his wife would die of a broken heart. While they're gone on their hike, the villagers are worked into a frenzy by a visiting member of the Diet who exclaims what they need to end the drought is a human sacrifice. Since all of the villagers think Yuki/Bando a strange person, they decide she'd be the perfect choice. They know, too, that her husband is gone for the night. The whole town gathers at the cottage and they drag her out.

The villagers' actions are interrupted a couple of times to show the fairy princess (also Bando) and her creature minions in all their colorful glory cavorting at the bottom of the lake. Shinoda uses kabuki costumes and obviously theatrical effects in these scenes rather than attempting a realism that would come off as phony.

Sensing danger, Kato and Yamazaki return just as Yuki's sacrifice is about to take place. They try to talk sense but the townspeople are too frightened of the consequences should they not go through with what they've started. Kato threatens to not ring the bell, to destroy it if they take her life, which will cause an apocalyptic flood. The people have lost faith in the legend and don't care whether he rings it or not. Yuki cuts her own throat to rob the villagers of their sacrifice. Kato, bidding adieu to his friend, follows her in suicide. The time for the bell to ring has already passed. The princess and fairies in the lake are overjoyed that they're free at last. The pond overflows and floods the surrounding countryside, drowning everyone except the teacher, who has tied himself to the poles holding the bell. Once the waters stop raging, Yamazaki peers out over the flooded plains and valleys. Right beside his perch are gigantic, majestic waterfalls. He watches as the princess and her court fairy ladies float up to heaven. *** (Shochiku) (No Tape)

1981 *Samurai Reincarnation* (Makai Tensho) 122 min. Dir. Kinji Fukasaku w/ Kenji Sawada, Shinichi "Sonny" Chiba, Ken Ogata, Tomisaburo Wakayama, Akiko Kana, Tetsuro Tamba, Hideo

Murota, Hiroyuki Sanada. Story of executed Christian revolutionary, Shiro Tokisada Amakusa (Sawada) returning from the grave to renounce God and use Satanic Black Magic to resurrect various prominent samurai killers from the past to help him take revenge on those who persecuted him. **1/2 American subtitled VHS=American Toei (out-of-print) Laser (Japan)=Toei

1982 *Black Magic Ninja Wars* (Iga Ninpo Cho aka *Ninja Wars* aka *Scroll Of Iga Ninja Magic*) 100 min. Dir. Mitsumasa Saito w/ Hiroyuki Sanada, Noriko Watanabe, Mikio Narita, Yoshiji Nakagashi, Shinichi "Sonny" Chiba, Jun Miko, Gojiro Sato **1/2 American Dubbed VHS (shortened version)=Prism Entertainment (out-of-print) VHS (Japan)=Toei

1983 *Legend of Eight Samurai* (Satomi Hakkenden) 136 min. Dir. Kinji Fukasaku w/ Hiroyuki Sanada, Etsuko Shiommi, Shinichi "Sonny" Chiba, Mari Natsuki. Big budget remake of a 1959 three-part serial (each part approx. 58 min.) directed by Kokichi Uchida and starring Sentaro Fushimi and Kotaro Satomi. **VHS (Japan)=Toei (Has also been available in EP speed, budget, dubbed-in-English VHS here in U.S., though I don't know the company)

Female Samurai Films:

What's the appeal, the attraction of a woman with a sword, the female of the species in (or out-of) period costume brandishing a razor sharp blade? I'm sure I don't have to tell you I'm talking about motion pictures and not the banalities of everyday reality. To most women viewers, this unfortunately rare archetype (especially rare on these shores) represents a powerful image of identification. They get to bask in the wonderfully virulent fallout of the heroine/anti-heroine in celluloid fiction pushed to its most potent distillation.

Male viewers, in addition to sharing with female fans the vicarious thrills, the spectacle of macho sadists having their villainous private parts pierced by righteous lady avengers (ahem!), also experience more. And the more is in the realm of the erotic. Both subtle, subliminal eroticism — the sensuality of the entire visual idea, the beguiling charm of the Special Female, Mother/Goddess, fertile Bringer-of-Life becoming a literal Death Harvester of the corporeal shells sheltering the soul; and the obvious eroticism, sometimes clumsy, immature, coarse, sometimes strikingly beautiful, gracefully refined, majestic and divinely awe-inspiring — individual shots of a ravaged woman suddenly possessed of near-superhuman strength, overcoming adversity. Even if everyone she loves has been destroyed, she enjoys nihilistic triumph not only surviving the Evil done unto her but mowing down all Evildoers — of course, all the more delightful inspiration of the senses when the carnage has been preceded or occurs simultaneously to this bewitchingly comely avenger losing her clothes.

In Chinese period genre films, swordplay by celluloid heroines happened throughout the sixties and continues to this day. Witness the recent revival of Wu Ma's *Deaf and Mute Heroine* from 1972 as well as the recent *Swordsman* trilogy. That is another article. However, in Japanese films the swordswoman has not proliferated in as great a number. Today, especially, the samurai heroine has all but vanished. Part of that is due to the fact there are only four or five *chanbara* productions a year (at the most!), whereas in the '50s-'70s time period there were at least ten times that annual number. Today sword-wielding heroines show up in the uneven, for the most part disappointing *Women Ninja* (*Kunoichi Ninpo* or more literally *Female Black Magic Ninjas*) series and in various trashy, though entertaining *yakuza* potboilers.

The real heyday for sword heroines in Japanese cinema began in the late fifties in various comparatively tame productions with such actresses as Hibari Misora, Michiko Saga and Fujiko Yamamoto and climaxed in glorious, blood-spurting profusion between 1968 — 1974 with the likes of Meiko Kaji, Junko Fuji, Michiko Yasuda, Hiroko Ogi, Junko Miyazono, Reiko Ike, Yoko Matsuyama, Keiko Nakamura, Yumiko Nogawa et al.

Strangely enough there's much greater evidence of female warriors and in particular, swordswomen, in Japanese history than in any period of Japanese cinema. Jessica Amanda Salmonson wrote an excellent article, "Swordswomen in Japanese Cinema," in the March, 1982 issue of *Martial Arts Movies* magazine, mentioning, among others, the real-life Hangaku Moritsuna in 1201, Itagaki, who led soldiers for the Taira (Heike) clan, Tomoe Gozen, a Minamoto clan leader, Masako Hojo, mother of the infamous holy man/priest, Nichiren, and various women warriors of the Meiji era Satsuma clan.

Some Female Samurai Films:

(I'm also including some in-period [usually set in 1920s] *yakuza* and contemporary *yakuza* films that have sword-brandishing heroines)

1958 *The Swishing Sword* (*Hitohada Kujaku* or *Peacock With Human Flesh*) Dir. Kazuo Mori w/ Fujiko Yamamoto. Raizo Ichikawa, Seizaburo Kawazu Yamamoto was, along with Machiko Kyo, Daiei's biggest female star in the 1950s. She starred in at least two pictures as a sword-wielding heroine. (Daiei) (No Tape)

1958 *Peony With Human Flesh* (*Hitohada Botan*) Dir. Kazuo Mori w/ Fujiko Yamamoto, Raizo Ichikawa (Daiei) (No Tape)

1958 *Lady Detective in Edo* (*Jiraiya Kaban*) Dir. Kinnosuke Fukuda w/ Hibari Misora, Chiyonosuke Azuma (Toei) (No Tape)

1959 *Young Blades' Obligations* (Iro Ha Wakashu) series:

1959 *Young Blades' Obligations* — *Flower Palanquin Pass* (Iro Ha Wakashu — *Hana Kago Toge*) Dir. Juichi Kono w/ Hibari Misora, Kotaro Satomi, Denjiro Okochi Female *matatabi* series. Misora played a woman samurai and/or wandering gambler in many films, most of them produced between 1952-1965. Other roles included geishas, stewardesses, gangsters, detectives, housewives, nightclub singers, etc. She was a child prodigy of sorts, an extremely popular singer/actress appearing in her first film in 1949 at the tender age of 12. She made the majority of her films at Toei, but also starred in many movies for Shochiku, Daiei and even a couple for Toho. She was only 52 when she died in 1989. #1 (Toei) (No Tape)

1959 *Young Blades' Obligations* — *Cherry Blossom in Long Sleeves* (Iro Ha Wakashu — *Furisode Zakura*) Dir. Ko Sasaki w/ Hibari Misora, Kotaro Satomi, Shinobu Chihara, Hiromi Hanazono #2 (Toei) (No Tape)

1960 *Oja Kissa* Dir. Ko Sasaki w/ Hibari Misora, Tomisaburo Wakayama (Toei) (No Tape)

1960 *Three Female Racketeers* (*Ojo Sando Gasa*) Dir. Kimiyoshi Yasuda w/ Tazuko Niki, Matasaburo Tamba Female *matatabi* action/comedy. (Daiei) (No Tape)

1961 *Okesa Uta Eba* Dir. Kazuo Mori w/ Raizo Ichikawa, Yoshie Mizutani, Yukio Hashi, Tamao Nakamura Mizutani plays sword carrying heroine and, along with Ichikawa and Hashi, one of the three lead characters. (Daiei) (No Tape)

1965 *Cat Girl Gamblers* (*Tobu No Mesu Neko*) series:

1965 *Cat Girl Gamblers* (*Toba No Mesu Neko*) Dir. Haruyasu Noguchi w/ Yumiko Nogawa, Hideaki Nitani, Ichiro Sugai, Tatsuya Fuji, Eiji Go I'm not positive but this seems to be the first

(continued)

of the more violent knife/sword-wielding female *yakuza* series. I'm not sure of the period — from the photos these could be set anytime between 1920 — 1960. #1 (Nikkatsu) (No Tape)

1965 *Cat Girl Gamblers — Naked Flesh Paid Into the Pot (Toba No Mesu Neko — Su Hada No Tsubo Furi or Debt Paid With Flesh)* Dir. Haruyasu Noguchi w/ Yumiko Nogawa, Hideaki Nitani, Tatsuya Fuji, Ryuji Kita #2 (Nikkatsu) (No Tape)

1966 *Cat Girl Gamblers — Abandoned Fangs of Triumph (Toba No Mesu Neko — Sha Kiba No Shobu)* Dir. Haruyasu Noguchi w/ Yumiko Nogawa, Ejji Go, Yoko Yamamoto, Jyo Shishido, Daizaburo Hirata #3 (Nikkatsu) (No Tape)

1966 *The Spider Tattoo (Irezumi)* 85 min. Dir. Yasuzo Masumura Screenplay: Kaneto Shindo w/ Ayako Wakao, Akio Hasegawa, Kei Sato, Gaku Yamamoto, Fujio Suga, Asao Uchida, Reiko Fujiwara. This is an in-period erotic thriller loosely-derived from the Junichiro Tanizaki tale of the same name. A couple are running away to elope aided by a husband and wife who own an inn/gambling den. But the young lovers are betrayed with the girl, Otsuya, sold into prostitution and her beau, Shinsuke, carted away by an assassin to be murdered. Shinsuke turns the tables, slaying his killer and then going into hiding. Otsuya is totally disillusioned. Her ideals destroyed and not yet knowing that Shinsuke has escaped, she becomes a sexually voracious and vindictive destroyer of nearly every male that falls into her bed.

A famous tattoo artist has gotten the brothel owner to let him create his masterpiece on Otsuya's beautiful back. Otsuya claims that the rendering of a black widow spider with a woman's head on her flesh is to blame for her drastic change of heart from sweet young girl to evil murderess. Shinsuke reveals himself to Otsuya, and she promises to hide him. However she's promised Gonji, the gambling den owner that she'd marry him if he killed his wife. When Otsuya refuses Gonji, he becomes abusive, and Shinsuke slays him to protect her. Tokubei, the brothel owner and Otsuya plan to blackmail Lord Serizawa (Kei Sato) but the scheme backfires. Tokubei is seriously wounded by Serizawa. Later, once they've escaped, Otsuya decides to finish off Tokubei, and Shinsuke is forced to help. Shinsuke is tortured by Otsuya's changed character.

Serizawa pursues her and she ends up falling in-love with the lord, much to Shinsuke's jealousy. When Shinsuke tries to kill her, she manages to deflect the blade and stab him instead. The tattoo artist, Seikichi, who's witnessed these depraved events, asks Otsuya to show him her tattoo one last time before she returns to Lord Serizawa. He then drives a knife into the tattoo, killing her, then kills himself. Another one of Masumura's masterpieces. As you probably already know he directed the excellent *Blind Beast (Moju)*, *Hoodlum Soldier (Hettai Yakuza)*, *Razor Hanzo's Hell Torture (Goyo Kiba #2)* (see *Cult Movies* #13, Part 2 of this article under *Fangs of Public Office/Hanzo the Blade*), *Red Angel (Akai Tenshi)* et al. VHS (Japan)=Daiel

1968 *Women's Prison (Hiroku Onna Ro)* series:

In-period (1860-1900) women in prison series of films from Daiel with heavy erotic and S&M/horror overtones. At least the first four were in black-and-white. Each picture had different characters from the last, the series aspect being in the subject matter, i.e., women in jeopardy and torture and in the time period:

Women's Prison (Hiroku Onna Ro or Secrets from A Women's Prison) 76 min. Dir. Akira Inoue w/ Michiyo Yasuda (now known as Michiyo Okusu), Sanae Nakahara, Mayumi Nagisa, Shigako Shimegi #1 VHS (Japan)=Daiel; *Women's Cell (Zoku Hiroku Onna Ro)* 1968, 84 min. Dir. Kimiyoshi Yasuda w/ Michiyo Yasuda,

Sanae Nakahara, Machiko Hasegawa, Kayo Mikimoto, Rokko Toura, Saburo Date #2 (Daiel) (TAPE?); *The Yoshiwara Story (Hiroku Onna Gura or Secrets of a Pleasure Quarter Brothel)* 1968 78 min. Dir. Kazuo Mori w/ Michiyo Yasuda, Masakazu Tamura, Machiko Hasegawa, Kayo Mikimoto #3 (Daiel) (TAPE?); *Secrets of a Women's Temple (Hiroku Onna Dera)* 1969, 79 min. Dir. Tokuzo Tanaka w/ Michiyo Yasuda, Sanae Nakahara, Shigako Shimegi, Machiko Hasegawa #4 (Daiel) (TAPE?); *Island of Horrors (Onna Ro Hizu or Women's Prison Secret Plan)* 1970 82 min. Dir. Toshiaki Kuniyoshi w/ Masakazu Tamura, Maya Kitajima, Reiko Kasahara #5 VHS (Japan)=Daiel; *Women's Prison for Torture (Hiroku — Nagasaki Onna Ro or Secrets — Nagasaki Women's Prison)* 1971 85 min. Dir. Akikazu Ota w/ Tomoko Mayama, Akane Kawazaki, Yoshiko Hara #6 VHS (Japan)=Daiel Note: I'm not 100% positive films #2, 3, 4 are out on video. I'm presupposing that they are since #1, 5, 6 are out. Also, you probably don't recognize the names of the last two directors (of #5 and 6) because they started working at Daiel (at least as full-fledged directors) right before Daiel went bankrupt and suspended production. Kuniyoshi and Ota both went on to direct a lot of television in the '70s-'80s, particularly many episodes of the *Zatoichi* TV show.

1968 *Woman Sazen (Onna Sazen)* series:

1968 *One-Eyed, One-Armed Swords Woman (Onna Sazen)* Dir. ? w/ Michiyo Yasuda First of two films with Yasuda as young girl (growing into a woman) losing an eye and arm when her whole family is massacred by villains for rare sword in their possession. Supposedly the first film deals with the massacre, her survival, then training as vengeance-bent swordswoman. The second film is her following through on her vendetta. From the two photos I've seen these look excellent. However they seem fairly obscure, especially this first one which I could only find mentioned in Jessica Salmonson's 1982 article in *Martial Arts Movies* mag. The *Sazen* reference in the Japanese title relates to the famous one-eyed, one-armed samurai hero, *Tange Sazen*. #1 (Daiel) (No Tape)

1969 *The Lefty Fencer (Onna Sazen — Nuretsubame Katate Giri or Woman Sazen — Wet With Blood From One Armed Sword Style)* Dir. Kimiyoshi Yasuda w/ Michiyo Yasuda, Kojiro Hongo, Isamu Nagato, Asao Koike #2 (Daiel) (No Tape)

1968 *Quick Draw Okatsu* series:

1968 *Poisonous Story of a Beautiful Witch — 100 Prayers of the Demoness (Yoen Dokufuden — Han Nya No Hyaku)* 90 min.

Dir. Yoshitomo Ishikawa w/ Junko Miyazono, Tomisaburo Wakayama Similar to above, with Miyazono portraying young noblewoman whose family's been slaughtered and how she transforms herself into "Quick-Draw Okatsu" vengeance-bent wanderer up against all manner of depraved lords, degenerate *yakuza* bosses, etc... #1 (Toei) (No Tape)

1969 *Quick Draw Okatsu (Yoen Dokufuden — Hitokiri Okatsu or Poisonous Story of a Beautiful Witch — Okatsu The Killer)* 89 min. Dir. Nobuo Nakagawa w/ Junko Miyazono, Ko Nishimura, Reiko Oshida, Shunji Imai, Yukie Kagawa, Tomisaburo Wakayama, Chujiro Tomita Oshida co-stars as another sword heroine. Nakagawa is the same Nakagawa who directed *Hell (Jigoku)* 1960 and *Tokaido Yotsuya Ghost Story (Tokaido Yotsuya Kaidan)* 1959 as well as many other kaidan and chanbara at Shinto in the fifties. (see section on Kaidan/ghost story films elsewhere in article). #2 (Toei) (No Tape)

1969 *Vendetta of a Samurai Girl (Yoen Dokufuden — Okatsu Kyojotabi or Poisonous Story of a Beautiful Witch — Okatsu, The Fugitive)* 84 min. Dir. Nobuo Nakagawa w/ Junko Miyazono, Tatsuo Umemiya #3 (Toei) (No Tape)

1968 *Red Peony Gambler (Hibotan Bakuto) or Woman Gambler* series:

1968 *Red Peony Gambler (Hibotan Bakuto)* 1968 98 min. Dir. Kosaku Yamashita w/ Junko Fuji, Ken Takakura, Tomisaburo Wakayama, Minoru Oki, Kyosuke Machida, Rintchi Yamamoto, Nobuo Kaneko. First in a series with Junko Fuji as Oryu — aka Hibotan or Red Peony because of a tattoo on her right shoulder — a beautiful woman gambler in 1920s Japan. In this initial outing, her father, a benevolent *yakuza* boss, is killed by Oki's clan, and she gives up much of what is traditionally feminine so she can avenge his death. Once accomplished, however, she finds the die is cast. She continues to wander as a respected independent boss from adventure to adventure in the next seven films. Amazing piece of cinematic evolution when you consider this was the most popular of all sword/knife-wielding heroine series in Japan, with a graceful, feminine yet strong, independent female protagonist capable of killing scores of villains to achieve justice/revenge. This was undoubtedly influenced by Daiel's series *Woman Gambler (Onna Tobakushi or Woman Gambling Expert aka Woman Yakuza)* with the great Kyoko Enami. It started in 1966 and ran for 17 films (till 1971). However, Enami hardly ever did any fighting leaving the knife-swinging and fistcuffs to the males 90% of the time (that and the fact it's set in a much more contemporary milieu is why you won't find it included here). ***1/2 #1 VHS (Japan)=Toei

1968 *Red Peony Gambler — Bowl of Rice and a Place to Sleep (Hibotan Bakuto — Isshuku Ippan)* 95 min. Dir. Norifumi Suzuki w/ Junko Fuji, Koji Tsuruta, Bunta Sugawara, Bin Amatsu, Tomisaburo Wakayama, Kyosuke Machida, Ko Nishimura, Mari Shiraki Director Suzuki is Fuji's uncle and contributed much of the screenwriting for the series. ***1/2 #2 VHS (Japan)=Toei

1969 *Red Peony Gambler — Flower Cards Showdown (Hibotan Bakuto — Hana Fuda Shobu)* 98 min. Dir. Tai Kato w/ Junko Fuji, Ken Takakura, Tomisaburo Wakayama, Kanjuro Arashi, Kyosuke Machida, Asao Koike

This, along with several other of Tai Kato's films, is among a handful of critically-acclaimed *yakuza* films in Japan. ***1/2 #3 VHS (Japan)=Toei

1969 *Red Peony Gambler — Second in Succession (Hibotan Bakuto — Nidaime Shumei)* 95 min. Dir. Shigeiro Ozawa w/ Junko Fuji, Ken Takakura, Kanjuro Arashi, Bin Amatsu, Hiroyuki Nagato #4 VHS (Japan)=Toei

1969 *Red Peony Gambler — Field of Broken Swords (Hibotan Bakuto — Tekkaba Retsuden)* 110 min. Dir. Kosaku Yamashita w/ Junko Fuji, Koji Tsuruta, Tetsuro Tamba, Tomisaburo Wakayama, Seizaburo Kawazu, Bin Amatsu, Kotaro Satomi ****#5 VHS (Japan)=Toei

1970 *Red Peony Gambler — Oryu's Allies (Hibotan Bakuto — Oryu Sanjo aka Oryu's Visit)* 99 min. Dir. Tai Kato w/ Junko Fuji, Bunta Sugawara, Tomisaburo Wakayama, Toru Abe, Kanjuro Arashi, Shingo Yamashiro ***1/2 #6 VHS (Japan)=Toei

1971 *Red Peony Gambler — Death to the Wicked (Hibotan Bakuto — O Inochi Deadakimasu)* 93 min. Dir. Tai Kato w/ Junko Fuji, Koji Tsuruta, Tomisaburo Wakayama, Minoru Oki, Seizaburo Kawazu, Kenjiro Ishiyama, Asao Uchida, Hiroshi Nawa, Kyosuke Machida ****#7 VHS (Japan)=Toei

1972 *Red Peony Gambler — On the Eternal Just Path (Hibotan Bakuto — Jingi To Oshimasu or To Side With Duty)* 95 min. Dir. Buichi Saito w/ Junko Fuji, Bunta Sugawara, Tomisaburo Wakayama, Hiroki Matsukata, Kyosuke Machida, Hiroyuki Nagato ***#8 VHS (Japan)=Toei

1968 *Kanto Woman Yakuza (Kanto Onna)*

Cult Movies

Yakuza series:

1968 *Kanto Woman Yakuza (Kanto Onna Yakuza aka Duel At The Quay)* 74 min. Dir. Akira Inoue w/ Michiyo Yasuda This series with Yasuda was initiated, I suppose, so Daitai could have their own "fighting" woman yakuza heroine as opposed to their *Woman Gambling Expert (Onna Tobakushi)* who did nothing but gamble while the males did the nasty, violent stuff. #1 (Daitai) (No Tape)

1969 *Kanto Woman Scoundrel (Kanto Onna Gokudo aka Badge Of Guts)* 87 min. Dir. Kazuo Mori w/ Michiyo Yasuda, Fumio Watanabe, Hosen Komatsu #2 (Daitai) (No Tape)

1969 *Kanto Woman's Bad Reputation (Kanto Onna Akumyo aka The Lone Avenger)* 83 min. Dir. Kazuo Mori w/ Michiyo Yasuda, Shintaro Katsu, Ko Nishimura, Yoshie Mizutani #3 VHS (Japan)=Daitai

1969 *Kanto Woman's Bad Temper (Kanto Onna Do Koryo aka Justice And Fury)* 78 min. Dir. Akira Inoue w/ Michiyo Yasuda, Teruo Yoshida, Ichiro Nakatani, Asao Koike #4 VHS (Japan)=Daitai

1969 *Bamboo Leaf Omon (Sasabue Omon aka Girl With The Bamboo Leaves aka Omon's Bamboo Leaf Whistle)* 76 min. Dir. Tokuzo Tanaka w/ Michiyo Yasuda, Ryohei Uchida, Akane Kawazaki, Asao Uchida Yasuda plays Omon, a woman skilled in using bamboo leaves as blades/darts to kill her enemies. (Daitai) (No Tape)

1969 *The Markiller (Onna Shikaku Manji aka The Woman Killer aka Fyflot Woman Assassin)* 90 min. Dir. Kosaku Yamashita w/ Junko Miyazono In-period follow-up to the Okatsu series. (Toei) (No Tape)

1969 (?) *The Temptress (?)* Dir. ? w/ Junko Miyazono I read about this particular film in Jessica Salmonson's 1982 *Martial Arts Movies* article, but I've not yet been able to find any other documentation re: date, director, Japanese title, etc... Supposedly the most sadistic and perverse of Miyazono's sword pictures. (Toei) (No Tape)

1969 *Crimson Bat (Mekura No Oichi)* series:

1969 *Crimson Bat — Blind Swordsman (Mekura No Oichi Monogatari — Makka Na Nagare Dori)* 88 min. Dir. Teiji Matsuda w/ Yoko Matsuyama, Isamu Nagato, Bin Amatsu, Chizuko Arai Oichi as a child darting down a woodland trail in the midst of a violent thunderstorm, calls out for her mother. Her mom has run away with a gambler, abandoning the little girl. Suddenly a tree next to Oichi is struck by lightning. It topples in her path, and Oichi falls beside it. The next morning she awakens to darkness — blind.

A well-meaning older man Oichi called 'Granddad' brings her up. Granddad had once been part of a trio of thieves operating along the Tokaido Road. One day several *matatabi* come looking for the old man. The leader is Denzo (Amatsu) aka Devil Denzo who was one of the three. Denzo is starting to accrue tremendous income through respectable legitimate channels and is afraid his previous partners will show up sometime in the future to blackmail him. Blind Oichi shouts in panic as her 'Granddad' is murdered. When Oichi later visits his grave, the villains approach again. Oichi lashes out at them with a sword, but she doesn't yet have the skill to produce lethal results. A passing *ronin* (Nagato) steps in to help, kills two of the three, but lightning-fast Denzo escapes.

Nagato later explains to Oichi that she has a natural balance, grace and talent with the sword that can't be learned, it's something you're born with. He teaches her swordsmanship over the next year or so. Oichi has fallen in-love with him and he with her. But he feels he isn't worthy enough to be her spouse, and he leaves one evening without saying goodbye.

The rest of the film is taken up with Oichi helping her 'Granddad's' other partner, an even

older fellow who has escaped from prison to try to buy back his daughter from a brothel. It transpires the girl is staying at a whorehouse run by Oichi's long-lost mother. While Oichi is paying off the girl's debt with money she's won from gambling, Denzo sneaks in and kills the girl and her father. When Oichi and her estranged mother discover the bodies, Oichi is convinced mom knows who killed them. Oichi is so angry with past resentments it won't take much for her to kill her own mother. Mom is now, belatedly, racked with tremendous guilt. Nagato arrives and explains it was Denzo who killed the pair. Nagato is supposed to meet Denzo for a sword match in a nearby clearing. Oichi asks to go in his place, and he agrees.

She shows up on the windy plain and within minutes of ferocious battle has slain Denzo. Nagato watches Oichi's lonely figure disappear into the distance. Despite the storyline, this first entry in the series emerges as one of the less sentimental in tone. However, compared to the next three, there's also less fighting, not as much



Women's Cell, 1968.

location work with more exterior shots shot on a soundstage. *Crimson Bat* was also a TV show but I've no information at all on those productions.

All four of these films are exceedingly rare. These versions are the dubbed-English ones with the dubbing sounding as if it was done by the same folks who dubbed many kung-fu sagas. In other words, the dubbing is poor-to-mediocre. Fortunately, none of these films sink to the level of incoherence found in sixties and seventies' Chinese productions. Also, despite having been transferred from Dutch video (Holland seems to be the only place they've been released on video), the film image is fairly clear and letterboxed! *** #1 (Shochiku) Dubbed -in-English VHS=from Holland, available on limited basis through Samurai Video (Suffern, N.Y.)

1969 *Trapped, The Crimson Bat (Mekura No Oichi — Jigoku Hada or Hell Flesh)* 87 min. Dir. Teiji Matsuda w/ Yoko Matsuyama, Jushiro Konoe, Toru Abe, Kikko Matsuoka, Yasunori Irikawa, Tadao Nakamaru This is probably my favorite of all four films. The pre-title sequence shows Oichi tangling with an outlaw *ronin* (Nakamaru in a cameo) with a price on his head. After an exciting fight, Oichi kills him and collects the bounty.

There's another female bounty hunter in the area played by Kikko Matsuoka, a sadistic villainess with a whip woven from human hair — "from the heads of men who broke women's hearts!" Not a bad sentiment, but otherwise Matsuoka's about as wicked as they come. Oichi and her are constantly at odds. Matsuoka nearly

kills Oichi in a duel where she hurls numerous poisonous snakes at her. Only one survives Oichi's sword, and it manages to bite her. Near death, Oichi's found by a young farmer.

He takes her to his cottage and nurses her back to health. They fall in-love, and Oichi accepts his marriage proposal. The village *yakuza* boss (Abe) knows he can never continue to victimize the farmers if Oichi and a benevolent *ronin* (Konoe) who is friend to the farmers continue to live. With Matsuoka's help, he snares Oichi's naive hubby in a crooked dice game. When the poor fellow can't pay the exorbitant amount that he's lost, the boss displays the body of one of the farmer's pals who'd dared to complain about the boss to the local magistrate. He orders the farmer to have Oichi kill the *ronin*, or he, himself, will be killed.

Returning home, he can't bear to tell Oichi. She remains outside, thinking. Two of the boss' men appear out of the darkness and confront her, hinting at the boss' ultimatum to her spouse. She can't get much more out of them, and they order her to be ready to accompany them at dawn. She realizes the marriage is doomed to failure. The next morning, she leaves only to be met again by *yakuza* clan members. They coerce her into leaving with them, explaining that otherwise her husband and friends will die. Suddenly the stocky *ronin* appears in the morning mist. The gangsters yell out for Oichi to kill him, but the *ronin* kills the pair with as many strokes. Oichi isn't positive who it is and is on the defensive till she hears Konoe's voice. He advises her to return to her husband. She declines, declaring she has her own score to settle.

Oichi meets Matsuoka, the boss and the rest of the clan. What follows is probably the most excitingly choreographed swordfight in the series, with Oichi finally overcoming the whipwoman, various swordsmen and the craven boss. In the last third of this protracted battle, the lighting abruptly changes. The early morning sunlight is blotted out as a deep dark blue envelopes everyone. Oichi slashes and tears in slow motion, red spurting in surreal geysers. Then a freeze-frame on her face and "The End." Also of note is the excellent score by the virtually unknown (in the U.S.) Hajime Kaburagi, a much more traditional sound than usual for this series with the eerie echoing of shamisens and biwas. ***1/2 #2 Dubbed-in-English VHS=Dutch video through Samurai Video

1969 *Watch Out, Crimson Bat! (Mekura No Oichi — Midare Gasa)* 87 min. Dir. Hirokazu Ichimura w/ Yoko Matsuyama, Goro Ibuki, Asahi Kurizuka, Rokko Taura, Shunji Imai, Jun Hamamura, Yoichi Numata, Gajiro Sato

Oichi runs into a dying courier and agrees to deliver a scroll for him to its appointed destination. Of course, all kinds of dastardly villains are also after the papers — a formula for a new kind of gunpowder. Oichi befriends a couple of teenage orphans and a young *ronin* (Ibuki) who is a former pupil of the gunpowder's inventor and also in pursuit of the scroll. The evil clan who are after the gunpowder formula are planning to overthrow the Shogunate and have been trying in vain to coerce the plans from the old gunsmith himself. Oichi loses the scroll when fighting with the clan samurai then falls over a cliff. She's nursed back to health by the *ronin*. They then journey with the two orphans to the gunsmith's village.

Oichi decides to go her own way, leaving her new friends behind. Since the village is the orphans' hometown and the *ronin* is engaged to the gunsmith's daughter, Oichi feels useless and unnecessary. However when the *ronin*, gunsmith and daughter are held hostage by the samurais, Oichi returns to rescue them. She holds her own during the climactic fight, but it seems hopeless. Without warning the hired sword who'd

(continued)

been helping the samurais, switches to Oichi's side, disgusted with the extreme cruelty of his employers. The two free Ibuki and the tide is turned. **1/2 #3 American dubbed-in-English VHS (pan-and-scan)=Video Action (out-of-print). Dubbed-in-English VHS=Dutch video through Samurai Video

1970 *Crimson Bat* — *Oichi! Wanted Dead or Alive!* (Mekura No Oichi — Inochi Moratnasu) 86 min. Dir. Hirokazu Ichimura w/ Yoko Matsuyama, Yuki Meguro, Hitoshi Omai, Tetsuro Tamba, Jun Tazaki, Reiko Oshida Oichi becomes the hunted with three bounty hunters — a huge, fake priest, a chain-and-sickle master and a young, embittered ex-doctor (Meguro) — after her hide. She manages to elude them, taking refuge in a fishing village that is being redeveloped as a port. The governor and yakuza boss are partners in the venture and are forcing the fishermen and other villagers from their homes without adequate compensation. Eventually Oichi becomes involved when she protects the kindly Kamecho, an elder leader of the village and his daughter, Ohan (Oshida).

The ex-doctor captures Oichi, holding her in a cave. He realizes they have much in common, and his heart changes towards her when she appeals to his idealistic side that has been long suppressed. When the other two bounty hunters intrude, trying to kill Oichi, he takes her side, and they slay his two former partners together. But the governor and yakuza boss are still victimizing the village. Kamecho is found murdered with evidence planted to make it look as if Oichi did it. The villagers are about to lynch Oichi when the young doctor intervenes with an eyewitness to the killing. The young man explains that the gangsters had stolen Oichi's sword and had dropped it at Kamecho's side after stabbing him to death.

Everyone returns to the village to find the governor's forces pulling down houses to make way for port construction. A battle erupts. Oichi, the doctor and few competent villagers seem outnumbered when help arrives from an unexpected quarter. The ronin (Tamba) the governor had hired as bodyguard turns out to be a Shogunate inspector investigating corruption in the province. He lauds Oichi for her help in rooting out the wicked. *** #4 Dubbed-in-English VHS=Dutch video through Samurai Video

1969 *The Woman Gambler* (Anego aka Elder Sister aka The Boss' Wife) 88 min. Dir. Buichi Saito w/ Hiroko Ogi, Akira Kobayashi, Shinjiro Ebara, Eiji Go VHS (Japan)=Nikkatsu

1969 *Vermillion Sword Scabbard and Gambling Code* (Shuzaya Jingi) series:

1969 *Storm of Violence* (Shuzaya Jingi — Tekka Midare Zakura or Vermillion Sword Scabbard Gambling Code — Sword Amongst The Swirling Cherry Blossoms) Dir. Buichi Saito w/ Hiroko Ogi, Meiko Kaji, Tatsuya Fuji Ogi, like Meiko Kaji, was a popular singing star in the latter sixties. She also sang theme songs for films (even one of the *Crimson Bat* pictures although I can't recall which one). In addition to appearing in quite a few films as a sword-wielding heroine, she also performed in more traditional roles in various yakuza and 'seishun' (young people) opuses, virtually all for Nikkatsu Studios in the late sixties. #1 (Nikkatsu) (No Tape)

1969 *Go To Hell!* (Shuzaya Jingi — O Inochi Chodai or Vermillion Sword Scabbard Gambling Code — Take A Life) 94 min. Dir. Buichi Saito w/ Hiroko Ogi, Ryo Ikebe, Tatsuya Fuji #2 (Nikkatsu) (No Tape)

1969 *Rising Dragon* (Nobori Ryu) series:

1969 *The Friendly Killer* (Nobori Ryu Tekka Hada aka Rising Dragon's Iron Flesh) 90 min. Dir. Teruo Ishii w/ Hiroko Ogi, Akira Kobayashi, Tatsuya Fuji, Toru Abe, Kokan Katsura Ogi's other yakuza sword series for Nikkatsu. She plays a boss' daughter who becomes his successor when he's murdered at a rival boss (Abe)'s

instigation. Kobayashi is a lone wolf who always seems to be around to help her at the crucial time. At the end, as he dies, she discovers he was the one hired by Abe to kill her father, and he'd been trying to redeem himself ever since. #1 (Nikkatsu) (No Tape)

1969 *The Dragon Tattoo* (Nobori Ryu Yawa Hada Kaicho aka Rising Dragon's Soft Flesh Exposed) 85 min. Dir. Masami Kuzuo w/ Hiroko Ogi, Tatsuya Fuji, Akira Kobayashi, Tamio Kawaji, Ryohei Uchida #2 (Nikkatsu) (No Tape)

1970 *The Tattooed Swordsman* (Kaidan Nobori Ryu aka Blind Woman's Curse aka Rising Dragon's Ghost Story aka Haunted Life of a Dragon-Tattooed Lass) 85 min. Dir. Teruo Ishii w/ Meiko Kaji, Hoki Tokuda, Makoto Sato, Yoko Takagi, Toru Abe, Ryohei Uchida, Hideo Sunazuka, Yoshi Kato, Yuzo Harumi

Kaji takes over Ogi's role (although Kaji is called by a different name). Incredibly entertaining tale of female yakuza boss in turn-of-the-century Japan who accidentally blinds a woman in another clan during a gangfight in the rain. Although very few overtly supernatural events occur, the whole atmosphere of the picture is one of nocturnal spiritual evil looking for an outlet in violent individuals. Ishii keeps the film straddling the border — very successfully I might add — between bizarre, surreal horror film and period yakuza/samurai tale. A mesmerizing hybrid, and the kind of tale at which Ishii really excels (see SAMURAI S&M/EROTICA section elsewhere in this article for coverage of Ishii's in-period horror/cruelty sextet of films — virtually all anthologies — *Jays of Torture*, *Hell's Tattoos*, *Orgies of Edo*, *Shogun and 3,000 Women*, *Love and Crime*, and *Yakuza Punishment—Lynch Law!*) *** 1/2 #3 VHS (Japan)=NIKKATSU

1969 *Tales of Japan's Chivalrous Women* (Nihon Jokyoden) series:

Five film female yakuza series (some set in the '20s, one set immediately in post-war '40s another in the '60s), all starring Junko Fuji with #s 1, 2, 4 co-starring Ken Takakura, #s 3, 5 co-starring Bunta Sugawara: *Chivalrous Geisha* (Nihon Jokyoden — *Kyokaku Geisha*) '69 99 min., Dir. Kosaku Yamashita, #1; *Brave Rd Flower of the North* (N.J. — *Makka Na Dokyo Bana*) '70 94 min., Dir. Yasuo Furuhashi, #2; *A Lively Geisha* (N.J. — *Tekka Geisha or Iron Geisha*) '70 100 min., Dir. Kosaku Yamashita, #3; *Duel of Swirling Flowers* (N.J. — *Ketto Midare Bana*) '71 107 min., Dir. Kosaku Yamashita, #4; *Trials of an Okinawan Village* (N.J. — *Geki To Hime Yuri Misaki*) '71 96 min., Dir. Shigeiro Ozawa #5. *Spaghetti Cinema's* Bill Connolly asked me once if I knew of a yakuza film with Junko Fuji and Bunta Sugawara set in Okinawa where, at the end, Sugawara's character is executed by a U.S. Occupation firing squad and Fuji does a mournful dance in the rain on the spot where he died. As a young teen, Bill had been an extra in the film when his family was stationed in Okinawa at the U.S. base. Well, Bill, this is it!

So far only #1, *A Chivalrous Geisha* (Kyokaku Geisha) is available on VHS (Japan)=Toei; others are all (Toei) (No Tape)

1969 *Flower of Chivalry Torn Asunder — Gambling Heir* (Kyo Ka Retsuden — *Shumei Toba*) 93 min. Dir. Keiichi Ozawa w/ Meiko Kaji, Chieko Matsubara, Tatsuya Fuji, Hideaki Nitani, Shinjiro Ebara (Nikkatsu) (No Tape)

1969 *The Woman Killer* (Showa Onna Jingi aka Showa Woman's Duty or Showa Woman's Gambling Code) 78 min. Dir. Taro Yuge w/ Kyoko Enami, Yusuke Kawazu, Kazuo Kitamura, Kenji Sugawara, Mikio Narita, Rokko Toura, Kikko Matsuoka, Asao Koike Enami stars as woman trying to find the murderer of her lover, a man belonging to the Horikawa gang. Much more violent as far as Enami's character's participation than her *Woman Gambling Expert* (Onna Tobakushu) series. According to one source, this was supposed to be the first of a series w/ Enami

as a female detective. (Daiei) (No Tape)

1970 *Woman Boss* (Onna Kumicho aka The Geisha Firefighter) 82 min. Dir. Masahiro Makino w/ Kyoko Enami, Makoto Sato, Izusu Yamada, Mikio Narita, Masahiko Tsugawa, Nobuo Kaneko, Michitaro Mizushima (Daiei) (No Tape)

1970 *Naked Ambition* (Onna Gokukaku Cho or Evil Woman's Diary) Dir. Kazuo Ikehiro w/ Michiyo Yasuda, Kei Sato (Daiei) (No Tape)

1971 *Orphan Gambler* (Onna Toseinin) series:

1971 *Okoma, the Orphan Gambler* (Onna Toseinin or Modern Woman) 90 min. Dir. Shigeiro Ozawa w/ Junko Fuji, Koji Tsuruta Fuji's other woman gambler series set in period milieu. But instead of being a more seasoned, established and respected personality in the yakuza community, she supposedly appears in these films as a bit of a neophyte, a newcomer learning the ropes in a dog-eat-dog world. Unfortunately — and surprisingly considering Fuji's ongoing popularity — neither of these are out on video. #1 (Toei) (No Tape)

1971 *Orphan Gambler 2* (Onna Toseinin — *Ota no Moshimasu*) 103 min. Dir. Kosaku Yamashita w/ Junko Fuji, Bunta Sugawara, Kyosuke Machida, Shogo Shimada #2 (Toei) (No Tape)

1972 *Cherry Blossom Fire Gang* (Kanto Hizakura Ikka aka Kanto Actress' Clan) 102 min. Dir. Masahiro Makino w/ Junko Fuji, Ken Takakura, Koji Tsuruta, Bunta Sugawara, Chiezo Kataoka, Tomisaburo Wakayama, Kanjuro Arashi. Fuji's swan song, retiring at the height of her popularity to get married to a kabuki stage actor. She's since reappeared in a couple of films in 1989 and 1991 respectively. This pretty much sums up the pattern for other 'ninkyo' or 'chivalrous' type yakuza films such as *Tales of Showa Era Cruelty* (Showa Zan Kyoden), *Tales of Japanese Chivalry* (Nihon Kyokakuden) and *Red Peony Gambler* (Hibotan Bakuto) series — program filler elevated to blood ritual status. Despite the repetitive nature of the genre, when these films are done right (which at Toei, NIKKATSU and Daiei was 85 to 90% of the time) they are nothing less than excellent. **** VHS (Japan)=Toei

1972 *Showa Woman Gambler* (Showa Onna Bakuto) 91 min. Dir. Tai Kato w/ Kyoko Enami, Hiroki Matsukata, Shigeru Amachi, Kanjuro Arashi *Red Peony Gambler*, Junko Fuji had just retired, and Daiei, Enami's parent contract studio had just gone belly-up. So Toei, apparently testing the waters, teamed up excellent yakuza director, Kato, with charismatic Enami hoping, I suppose, to start another female yakuza series and strike box-office lightning. This appears to be the only one that they made so I guess things didn't pan out as far as attendance. Nevertheless this has a good critical rep, and I would very much like to see it. (Toei) (No Tape)

1972 *Ginjo* series:

1972 *Ginjo Wanderer* (Ginjo Wataridori) Dir. Kazuhiko Yamaguchi w/ Meiko Kaji, Tatsuo Umemiya, Akiko Koyama, Tsunehiko Watase Yamaguchi, director of the majority of the *Sister Streetfighter* series turns out two pictures with Kaji as a lone wolf yakuza avenger. These seem pretty obscure since I had to really dig through back issues of *Kinem Junpo* to find out about them. #1 (Toei) (No Tape)

1972 *Tiger Drifter* — *Cat-Girl Gambling* (Ginjo Nagaremono — *Mesu Neko Bakuchi*) Dir. Kazuhiko Yamaguchi w/ Meiko Kaji, Shinichi "Sonny" Chiba, Shingo Yamashiro #2 (Toei) (No Tape)

1972 *Tiger Lily* (Hichirimen Bakuto aka The Silk Gambler) Dir. Teruo Ishii w/ Keiko Nakamura, Bunta Sugawara, Sanae Tsuchida, Hiroko Fuji, Reiko Ike, Junko Matsuhel, Midori Hoshino, Minoru Oki, Shingo Yamashiro, Hiroshi Nawa, Asao Koike Toei's next bid to strike lightning a la *Red Peony Gambler*. They really seemed

to push this when it first came out with full page ads in two different issues of *Kinema Junpo*. However, except for an enthusiastic mention by Jessica Amanda Salmonson in her *Martial Arts Movies* article about female samurais, this seems to have sunk without a trace. Too bad, especially with the ad's multiple swordswomen imagery and Teruo Ishii's sure-to-be-perverse involvement. The first of a prospective series — they even say so in the ad — but no more were forthcoming. (Toei) (No Tape)

1973 Ocho series:

1973 *Story of a Depraved Elder Sister — Ocho's Sake Cup* (Furyo Anego Den — Cho No Roku Ocho) Dir. Norifumi Suzuki w/ Reiko Ike, Seizaburo Kawazu, Hiroshi Nawa Another gambling swordswoman pair of pictures from Toei that was praised in the 1982 *Martial Arts Movies* article on swordswomen. Yet again I had to dig like an archaeologist to find info on these two films. Why doesn't Toei bring all these undoubtedly viscerally exciting pictures out on the miracle of video? #1 (Toei) (No Tape)

1973 *Story of a Depraved Elder Sister — Wide-spread Lynch Law* (Yasugure Anego Den — Sokatsu Rinchu) Dir. Teruo Ishii w/ Reiko Ike, Ryohei Uchida #2 (Toei) (No Tape)

1973 Lady Snowblood (Shura Yukihime) series:

1973 *Lady Snowblood* (Shura Yukihime) 97 min. Dir. Toshiya Fujita w/ Meiko Kaji, Toshio Kurosawa, Eiji Okada, Ko Nishimura A band of brigands assaults a young couple out for a walk in the country. The husband is brutally murdered in literal geysers of crimson. The wife barely holds onto her sanity as she is violated and then thrown into jail. Already pregnant, she gives birth to a little girl one snowy night with the other inmates tearfully attending. She christens the little tyke, Yuki, because of the blizzard outside, then expires. Yuki grows into a young girl. An elderly martial arts master, Nishimura, instructs her mercilessly in the art of sword and killing so when the time comes she can avenge her parents.

Yuki grows into a beautiful young woman (Kaji). Okada, leader of the bandits, is now a respected and wealthy right-wing fanatic helping to raise havoc behind the scenes of the 1920s' Japanese government. Yuki finds each of the men involved in her parents' death and slays them. Along the way, a sadistic whore who'd been tagging along with the evil men, nearly kills Yuki. A political writer, Kurosawa, has joined Yuki in her mission and helps her kill the monstrous bitch. He finally sacrifices himself to pin Okada to the wall so Yuki can run him through. Shot several times, Yuki stumbles away from the mansion and the masked ball in progress. She falls prostrate in the snow and falls asleep. We assume she could never survive. However when the sun rises, a yellow glow on her face awakens her. She rises and staggers away. ***1/2 VHS (Japan)=Toho

1974 *Lady Snowblood — Web of Treachery* (Shura Yukihime — Urami Koi Uta or Love Song of Resentments) 89 min. Dir. Toshiya Fujita w/ Meiko Kaji, Yoshio Harada, Juzo Itami, Shin Kishida, Rinichi Yamamoto Yuki is attacked by police in a cemetery as she visits a loved one's grave. The film opens up with an intoxicatingly delirious tracking shot as Yuki slashes her way down a forest path, dispatching her pestering official pursuers in a rain of blood. In fact, the whole first ten minutes or so of the film are unrelieved carnage, a visceral vicarious stretch of nihilistic thrills that end only when Yuki tires and gives herself up.

Being carted away to prison, a band of caped men ambush the prison wagon and kidnap her to their elegant lair. Classic Toho villain, Shin Kishida, plays the ringleader of another bunch of fascist maniacs who want to shanghai Yuki

to use as one of their assassins. To escape their clutches, she'll agree to just about anything. They plant her as a maid in the house of another subversive, this time a Marxist writer. They don't count on her befriending the fellow. Finally they kidnap him, and Yuki escapes. Horrible torture of the writer follows.

Yuki hides out with a cynical ex-doctor (Harada) who'd helped her earlier. He's now living in abject poverty in a ghetto. The writer is released on the edge of the ghetto, and Harada reluctantly tends the man's wounds. But he's been beaten too ferociously and dies. The dead writer's other maid, who was his lover, goes crazy. She assaults the evil detective (Yamamoto) who'd interrogated the writer and stabs him in the eye. Even after several of the inspector's colleagues slash at her with their swords, she has to be pried off of his bleeding face.

Having locked Yuki in one of the mansion's rooms, the fascists set fire to the ghetto. Yuki escapes and kills all the fascists at the house. She makes a beeline to the smoking ashes of the ruins. Harada has survived the inferno but is near collapse. He draws his sword and insists on accompanying Yuki to attack the remaining rightist ringleaders. All of them are cut down on the grounds of a temple. Kishida is the last to die, and he pumps both Harada and Yuki full of lead. Once again the male lead (this time, Harada) sacrifices himself, holding onto Kishida even though it means death, so Yuki can approach and stab him.

Director, Fujita, helmed several yakuza and many anarchic juvenile delinquent pictures at NIKKATSU in the 1969-1971 period before the studio changed over to an almost exclusively "Roman Porno" output. Kaji appeared in many of his pictures, and their Nikkatsu relationship probably explains their teaming-up here. Fujita was also a protegee of Seijun Suzuki, and later appeared as actor in Suzuki's 1980 experimental ghost story, *Zigeunerweisen*. ***1/2 #2 VHS (Japan)=Toho

1986 *Death Shadows* (Jitemai) 116 min. Dir. Hideo Gosha w/ Mariko Ishihara, Mari Natsuki, Takuzo Kawatani, Tsunehiko Watase, Eitaro Ozawa (see *Cult Movies* #12, Part 1 of this article on Hideo Gosha) *** Amer.dubbed VHS=J.A. Video Productions (out-of-print) VHS (Japan)=Shochiku

1991 Women Ninja (Kunoichi Ninpo or Female Black Magic Ninjas) series:

1991 *Women Ninjas* (Kunoichi Ninpo aka Female Black Magic Ninjas) Dir. Katsu Tsushima w/ Yasuyo Shirashima, Reiko Hayama, Hitomi Okasaki Produced directly for video (with some scenes on film, some on very high-definition videotape), this is a reprise/remake of a mid-'60s film of the same name directed for Toei by Sadao Nakajima (see "Ninja" section of this article in next issue). This isn't exactly bad. But it isn't very good, either. The costuming which consists of micro minis made out of obvious 20th century materials is probably the worst and most visible fault. The stories seem to gradually improve as the series progresses, but this is basically a soft-core porno enterprise as well as action one, and the heroines and villainesses drop their drawers at the slightest instigation. I used to think this was bad. Since then I've seen some films that are worse, so I guess I've gotta be happy this is at least mediocre. *1/2 #1 (Sumikawa Film/Cinemarion) VHS (Japan)=King Video

I'm not positive, but Video Search of Miami may have this series available with English subtitles

1992 *Women Ninjas — Holy Woman's Treasure* (Kunoichi Ninpo — Setsho Jo No Himo) 80 min. Dir. Katsu Tsushima w/ Yuki Sumida, Kenji Yamaguchi, Miki Mizuno, Reiko Hayama A bit of an improvement over the first installment with even more supernatural overtones. ** #2

(Sumikawa Film/Cinemarion) VHS (Japan)=King Video

1993 *Women Ninjas 3* (Kunoichi Ninpo —) 79 min. Dir. Katsu Tsushima w/ ? #3 (Sumikawa Film/Cinemarion) VHS (Japan)=King Video

1994 *Women Ninjas — Secret Summary of the Loyal 47 Ronin* (Kunoichi Ninpo — Chushingura Hisho) 73 min. Dir. Katsu Tsushima w/ ? #4 (Sumikawa Film/Cinemarion) VHS (Japan)=King Video

1995 *Women Ninjas 5* (Kunoichi Ninpo) Dir. Katsu Tsushima w/ ? #5 (Sumikawa Film/Cinemarion) VHS (Japan)=King Video

1995 Secrets From a Women's Prison (Onna Ro Hisho) series:

1995 *Secrets From a Women's Prison — The Magistrate's Daughter* (Onna Ro Hisho — Musume Bugyo) 78 min. Dir. Ryoji Nishimura w/ Ayako Takashi, Takeshi Shinya, Mieko Arai, Kazushige Otake. From the video packaging this is apparently the third film of an ongoing series. It's made by the same people who make the *Women Ninjas* (Kunoichi Ninpo) series and is also straight to video without any theatrical release. It seems to be inspired by the Daiet *Women's Prison* (Hiroku Onna Ro) series from the sixties. There's plenty of nudity, torture and swordplay. However, this looks nowhere near as cheesy as the first couple of *Women Ninjas* films. The costuming is not perfect but it's reasonably authentic compared to this company's previous efforts. ***1/2 #3 (Sumikawa Film/Cinemarion) VHS (Japan)=King Video

That's it for Part 3. Originally this was supposed to be the concluding part of "Samurai Films: A Neglected Genre." But all of it just went on too long, even after editing, so — one more part, Part 4, The Conclusion(!) will appear in the next issue of *Cult Movies*. I promise! (not just to you, the readers, but to the editors who are, I'm sure, about ready to order yours truly to commit *hara-kiri*). The concluding Part 4 will include the *Ninja* and the *Matatabi* films I've promised for so long as well as some excellent (believe it or not) *Erotic/S&M Samurai* films.

I want to acknowledge obtaining quite a bit of information — titles, credits, etc., for some of the more obscure *Kaidan* films from Stuart Galbraith IV's *Japanese Science Fiction, Horror and Fantasy Films*, published by McFarland Press. I've also, as I've mentioned in the text, perused countless back issues (1954-1975) of *Kinema Junpo* magazine (it's in Japanese so you should be a bit familiar with the language if you hope to get anything out of it) to glean titles and credits for movies not found in the "usual" places. For other bibliographical info see Parts 1 & 2 of this article in *Cult Movies* #s 12, 13).

Several samurai films have been released on video since Part 2 of this article: *Hara-Kiri* (Seppuku), *Sword of Doom* (Daibosatsu Toge), and *Sanjuro* (Tsubaki Sanjuro), all excellent, all three subtitled and letterboxed from Home Vision. *Sanjuro* was also released on Criterion laser disc (now Criterion, how about *Sword of Doom* and *Hara-Kiri*?). *Chambara* Entertainment just brought out three more *Zatoichi* films: *Zatoichi, the Fugitive* (Zatoichi Kyogotabi), #4 in the series; *Adventures of a Blind Man* (Zatoichi Sekisho Yaburi), #9; and *The Blind Swordsman's Cane Sword* (Zatoichi Tekka Tabi), #15. All three are excellent, especially *Zatoichi, the Fugitive*. *Chambara's* video store, Video Action, is located in downtown L.A. on 1st Street just east of Figueroa (not only do they sell *Zatoichi* videos but they also rent them as well as several other out-of-print samurai films such as *Red Lion*, *Death Shadows*, etc.,). Also Merlin David's *Samurai Video* continues to be an excellent source for samurai films (*Zatoichi*, *Lone Wolf and Child*, *Kyoshiro Nemuri*, *Ninja-Band of Assassins*, *Crimson Bat*, *Lady Snowblood*, *Illusion of Blood*, etc.,) at P. O. Box 372, Suffern, N.Y., 10901, fax# 914-357-0780. ■

The Epic Saga of Kharis the Mummy



The Mummy's Hand, 1940.

by Frank J. Dello Stritto

(Note: In 1994, *Egyptian Mummies* by Bob Brier was published by Morrow & Co.. Chapter 11 in the book is "The Mummy in Fiction and Film," to which I contributed. While my part is generously acknowledged in the introduction, a lot of my ideas did not survive the final editing. So, I appreciate the opportunity to present some of them here. The brief summary of mummy fiction below relies heavily on *Egyptian Mummies*, which is recommended to Cult Movies readers interested in mummies both in and out of the movies.)

"Who shall defile the temples of the ancient Gods, a cruel and violent death shall be his fate, and never shall his soul find rest unto eternity. Such is the curse of Amen-Ra, king of all the Gods."

Between 1940 and 1944, Universal Pictures produced four mummy films — *The Mummy's Hand* (1940), *The Mummy's Tomb* (1942), *The Mummy's Ghost* (1944) and *The Mummy's Curse* (1944). These are not sequels to the Karl Freund/Boris Karloff 1932 classic *The Mummy*. Im-Ho-Tep, the Karloff mummy, is never mentioned in them. The four 1940s films comprise the tale of Kharis. They are a much maligned quartet. Hastily made to cash in on WWII audiences' inexhaustible demand for juvenile entertainment, they contain any number of inconsistencies,

and errors subtle (10 shots fired from a six shooter) and blatant (archaeologists using dynamite and pickaxes to enter a tomb). They pale in comparison to *The Mummy*. Yet the enduring icon of popular culture is not Im-Ho-Tep, but Kharis. Slowly lumbering through deserts, woods and swamp, crippled arm held close to his body, dragging behind a useless leg, his face a withered pulp of scar and wrinkles, Kharis has been defeated by all but death itself. Passionately in love with his lost Princess Ananka, distrustful of his guardian priests, he can only choke victims with his one good hand or carry off "the girl." Viewed in sequence — as is encouraged by the recent issue of all four on a single laser disc — the four films tell his epic saga, which reads more like grand opera than monster movies. And the Kharis films contain enough flashes of creativity and surprise to reward a viewer patient through their repetitive clichés. The combined running length of the four films is only slightly over four hours, but the saga spans 60 years:

The Mummy's Hand: The priests of Karnak use the living mummy Kharis to guard the tomb of his beloved, Princess Ananka. Kharis is kept alive and controlled by rations of tana leaves. A team of archaeologists excavates Ananka's tomb. Andoheb, the high priest, dispatches Kharis to stop them, and the mummy kills several of them. Andoheb is distracted by the sole woman in the expedition and plans eternal life for her and himself via tana leaves. He is gunned down and Kharis is destroyed by fire.

The Mummy's Tomb: 30 years later. Andoheb survived the shooting and sends a revived Kharis and a young priest, Mehemet Bey, to America to avenge the original desecrators and their descendants. Kharis succeeds until Bey becomes obsessed with the fiancée of the last victim and has Kharis abduct her. Her rescuers pick up the trail. Bey is shot and Kharis is again destroyed by fire.

The Mummy's Ghost: But Kharis has survived. From Egypt Andoheb orders Youssef Bey to assist him, for the Gods now allow Kharis to seek the reincarnation of his beloved Ananka. He finds her in Amina, an Egyptian exchange student. When Bey desires Amina for himself, Kharis kills him and flees with Amina. They are driven into a bed of quicksand by their pursuers. As they sink, Amina transforms to a mummified corpse.

The Mummy's Curse: 25 years later. The swamp is drained, and Kharis and Ananka separately revive. Ananka, under sunlight, reverts to her youthful appearance. Kharis brings her to a deserted monastery where his guardians, Zandaab and Ragheb, await to transform her again to Ananka. But Ragheb abducts a woman, and kills Zandaab when they argue. Kharis literally brings the monastery crashing down on them. In the cellars, the mummified body of Ananka is found.

Viewing in sequence only heightens the inconsistencies. The plots transverse more than 3 generations, but each is set in the 1940s. Name changes between films, such as "Karnak" to "Arkam" and "Babe Jensen" to "Babe Hanson," are unexplained. Kharis supposedly needs 3 tana leaves each night during the full moon to live, but survives quite well for years in the woods of New England without them. Kharis and Ananka sink in a bog in Massachusetts, but emerge from a swamp in Louisiana. The attention to archaeological detail and accuracy that marks *The Mummy* virtually disappears early in the series.

The films are quite similar and repetitive. Only the most dedicated Kharis fans can tell which is which, and even horror film experts are often confused. Drake Douglas, in his excellent book *Horror!* badly mangles the different plot lines. Drake's book first appeared in 1966 (reissued in 1989), long before video tapes allowed film historians to rely on more than their memories. Even *The Creature Features Movie Guide*, and its many updates (the last, I believe, in 1988) confuse the Kharis films — though the *Movie Guide* describes Ananka's reincarnation as a key plot element in *The Mummy's Hand* and *The Mummy's Tomb*, it's never mentioned in those films. The most complete treatment of the Kharis series to date is in Brunas' and Weaver's *Universal Monsters*, and as always they get the facts straight.

Repetition exhausts most elements of the series, but inadvertently emphasizes the saga's singular feature — the peculiar relationship between Kharis and his guardian priests of Karnak/Arkam. Kharis was cursed by the gods for defying them in pursuit of a furtive love. In each film, the priests (except for Zandaab) commit the same sin. Thus is

the curse of the priests of Karnak/Arkam – to minister onto Kharis, to attempt to control him, is to act out his unholy sin. Perhaps Kharis, the most passionate of lovers in life and the most cruelly repressed and inhibited in his living death, projects his desires onto his guardians and masters, who compulsively reenact his crime. Are the priests controlling Kharis or vice versa?

The Kharis films owe as much to Frankenstein as to Im-Ho-Tep. Distinctive characters in the 1930s, the mummy and the Frankenstein monster became in the 1940s increasingly dehumanized. The true protagonists of the individual Kharis films are the high priests. In effect the dual nature of Karloff's 1932 role – the revived mummy and Ardath Bey – is split into two characters. Or, perhaps more accurately, just as the Frankenstein films have the monster and the doctor, the Kharis films have the mummy and the high priest. But the Kharis films achieve a unity that the Frankenstein films lack through the mummy's quest to defend and retrieve his lost love, Ananka.

Though the Frankenstein films of the 1940s are far superior to the Kharis films, they dropped a key element of the legend – that the monster is the dark side of the doctor, doing what Frankenstein desires but dare not or cannot act on. This plot element is certainly present in *Frankenstein* (1931) and *Bride Of Frankenstein* (1935). Frankenstein ignores Elizabeth while pursuing his obsessions, but the Monster, once free, is soon in her bedroom. Starting with *Son Of Frankenstein* (1939), the relationship between the doctor and monster diminishes. To the doctors, the monster is hardly an individual at all – only the spark that sets off their obsessions. For Frankenstein's sons (in *Son Of Frankenstein* and *Ghost Of Frankenstein* (1942)) the quest is to clear the family name. Dr. Mannering in *Frankenstein Meets The Wolfman* (1943) has a rather mundane life in a provincial hospital, and is simply intoxicated with the thrill of Frankenstein's work. Dr. Niemann in *House Of Frankenstein* (1944) is out for revenge and to prove his own outlandish theories. Dr. Edelmann in *House Of Dracula* is tainted with the blood of the vampire, which fires his darkest urges. As the series progresses, the monster has less and less screen time, virtually no dramatic scenes – certainly not with the doctor – and spends most of the films on an operating table.

"For the sin he had committed, Kharis was condemned to be buried alive. But first they cut out his tongue so the ears of the gods would not be assailed by his unholy curses...For over 3,000 years Kharis has remained in his cave on the other side of this mountain. And there he waits to bring death to whomever tries to defile Ananka's tomb, for Kharis never really died."

Kharis and the Karnak/Arkam priests share an unholy bond – all are cursed to lives of repression that they cannot endure. The priests can rebel – and in all four films they do – but not Kharis. That is Kharis' curse, his horror, and what makes his fate the cruelest of all the Universal monsters. He eternally loves Ananka; but tongue cut out, one eye gone, encased in mummy wrappings, crippled and burned, he can scarcely act on that passion in this world. And the priests hold him in this world with tana leaves – three



The Mummy's Curse, 1944.

leaves each night during the cycle of the full moon to keep him alive, nine to give him "life and motion." Never more than nine, for then the priests could not control him. Perhaps his many infirmities would be cured with the proper dose of tana leaves. Andoheb's master tells us at the outset of the saga that more than nine leaves would make Kharis "an uncontrollable monster, a soulless demon, with the desire to kill and kill." The priests' first concern is control, for Andoheb reminds us later that Kharis "lives only for the purpose for which he was created – to guard Ananka's tomb until the end of time." Kharis fought his curse, and he opposed all the guardian priests (and killed them in the last two films). Ultimately he is the slave of tana leaves and his own love for Ananka. At its best, the Kharis films let us see his damnation in its naked horror. That happens only once in the series.

"Remove you medallion of the lay priests. It's time for you to wear the medallion of the high priests. Now, swear by the ancient Gods of Egypt that you will not betray your trust... Oh, mighty Gods of Egypt, you have chosen my successor. May you find him worthy."

And what of this "strange race of high priests," as the first of the unbelieving desecrators called them? All the Kharis films begin with the induction of a new priest. As we learn beyond doubt in *The Mummy's Tomb*, their oath involves celibacy. All the priests had trouble with that vow. We are surprised to learn in *The Mummy's Hand* from Andoheb's own lips that he has been attending a Cairo vaudeville show, mainly to admire a magician's lovely assistant. When she turns up later as one of the desecrators of Ananka's tomb, he soon forgets his vows.

After Andoheb anoints Mehemet Bey in *The Mummy's Tomb*, he mutters to the Gods, "save him from any temptation that might destroy him, as it nearly destroyed me." Andoheb's fear is justified, for while avenging the desecration of Ananka's tomb, Mehemet Bey becomes obsessed with a woman.

"This time Kharis, I am sending you upon a different mission, one of life rather than of death. You are eternal Kharis, earthly pains and sickness cannot touch you. Like the age old hills of Egypt – you exist, you are. The ancient line of the high priests of Karnak must minister on to you until the end of time, Kharis. I shall do that for you, Kharis. I am going to take onto myself a wife, Kharis. Do you understand that?"

The most moving scene in the series is when Bey dispatches Kharis to abduct the object of his obsession. The depths of feeling in Kharis are never more vividly shown – he reacts with confusion, disbelief, fear and anger. Lon Chaney, Jr., his face mostly in shadow, conveys these complex emotions purely through body language and subtle (mostly) movements. The scene is one of the finest moments of his career.

Soon Kharis delivers the girl, and Bey whispers to her, "for you I am going to forsake the teachings that has been handed down for generations upon end." His plans are soon foiled.

The Mummy's Ghost repeats the sequence, with far less effect. On the brink of success in retrieving Ananka's reincarnation, Youssef Bey is overcome with desire for her. An "inner" voice tells him:

(continued)

"You have done your work well, Youssef Bey. The Gods will look with favor upon you. Why do you not rejoice? Perhaps because it grieves you to consign this lovely girl to death again. Why should she not live, Youssef Bey? Why should you not live?... And what of your destiny as a man? You are thousands of miles from the tombs of Arkam. She is thousands of years from her sin. Look at her - she is beautiful. Kharis dared to love her. Are you less brave than he?"

Thus is the link between Kharis and his priests. They are his descendants. What he dared they dare. His damnation is in this world. Theirs, perhaps even more horrible, is in the next. The only priest to escape that fate is Zandaab who errs in recruiting the lustful Ragheb but never strays from his vows.

"You are here because the Gods have willed it so. Do you know who you are? You are the Princess Ananka, third daughter of Amenophis, one-time Pharaoh of all Egypt. Centuries ago you died a cursed death... You cannot escape your destiny."

Halfway through the Kharis saga, the series is rejuvenated by a new plot device, Ananka's reincarnation. It's never mentioned in *The Mummy's Hand* and *The Mummy's Tomb*, whose driving element is revenge. *The Mummy's Ghost* and *The Mummy's Curse* show tighter budgets and shooting schedules than the two previous films, but Ananka gives them some of the most effective horror scenes of the decade: her mummy dissolving as Kharis watches, the aging of Amina/Ananka as she sinks in the bog, and Ananka's resurrection from the drained swamp. Virginia Christian's Ananka in *The Mummy's Curse* is the outstanding performance of the series, and gives us some inkling of what inspired Kharis' love.

Reincarnation is also the central plot device in 1932's *The Mummy*, and in mummy fiction is general. The Kharis saga is hardly the pure invention of film writers. Key elements of Kharis' legend - reincarnation, tana leaves, reanimation, forbidden knowledge, eternal love, living mummies guarding ancient tombs, vengeful Egyptian gods, and even he name "Kharis" itself - are found in mummy fiction. Mummies have appeared in fiction for millennia, and quite frequently over the last 150 years. The mummy has proven a most flexible literary device, and revived mummies in fiction range from mindless killers to eloquent gentlemen, from tragic hero to comic relief.

One of the oldest known mummy tales is one of the surviving stories of Setne Khamwas. Quite possibly, "Kharis" is merely a more pronounceable form of "Khamwas." The historical Khamwas was the fourth son of Rameses II and a high priest at Memphis (Kharis himself in life was "a prince of the royal house"). The Khamwas stories were written around 200 BC - about 1000 years after Khamwas died. By then legend had transformed him to a powerful magician. Khamwas' encounter with a living mummy deals with his quest for the forbidden Book of Thoth. The Book is buried in the tomb of Prince Naneferkaptah, who in life had stolen it. As punishment, the god Thoth drowns his family and then Naneferkaptah himself (note: approximately the same revenge that the Monster extracts from the Doctor in Mary

The Tomb of a thousand TERRORS!

Universal Pictures Present



Shelley's novel *Frankenstein*. The influence of ancient horror stories on modern ones is extensive). When Khamwas breaks into the tomb, the mummy of Naneferkaptah rises. This mummy is quite the opposite of a mindless killer, and engages Khamwas in a contest over the Book. Khamwas uses his magic to steal it, but terrible misfortunes follow. Khamwas eventually returns the Book to the tomb.

Edgar Allen Poe, Arthur Conan Doyle and Bram Stoker all wrote mummy stories. In Poe's satire "Some Words with a Mummy" (1845), a mummy named "Allamistakeo" is revived and has an animated discussion with the scientists in attendance. Conan Doyle's mummy in "Lot 249" is far more sinister. An Oxford student purchases a mummy, revives it, and uses it to murder his enemies. The mummy is eventually burned, along with some "old leaves" which may have figured in



The Mummy's Ghost, 1944

its revival (we are never told just how the revival is performed). These leaves may be the prototypes for the "tana leaves" of Kharis. Conan Doyle also wrote "The Ring of Thoth," which does not involve a living mummy, but rather an ancient Egyptian whose curse of immortality is broken when the mummy of his beloved is discovered in modern times. The single work which most influenced horror films is probably Bram Stoker's *The Jewel of Seven Stars*, published in 1912. Stoker's novel links reanimation of a mummy (an Egyptian queen) with the reincarnation of its soul in a living person (an Egyptologist's daughter). The reanimation is more reminiscent of Frankenstein than Kharis or Im-Ho-Tep - electric lights, operating table and mad doctor.

Reincarnation and the search for a lost love, the dominant themes of the last two Kharis films also have clear roots in fiction. In Theophile Gautier's 1857 novel, *The Romance Of A Mummy*, a character stands before the newly unwrapped mummy of Queen Tahoser:

"As he stood beside the dead beauty, the young lord experienced that retrospective longing often inspired by the sight of a marble or painting representing a woman of past time celebrated for charms: it seemed to him that he might have loved her if he had lived 3500 years ago, this fair being that the grave had left untouched."

Burton Stevenson's 1917 novel *A King Of Babylon* tells of a movie crew on location in Egypt, filming the tale of an archaeologist searching for the tomb of a pharaoh. During the location shooting, archaeologists actually find mummies of a pharaoh and his forbidden love, a slave. Their souls take possession of the leading actors, who vanish into the desert.

One of the outgrowths of the discovery of Tutankhamen's tomb in 1922 was a craze of mummy novels. Many of these involve the curse of death on those who disturb the mummies' rest. One of the most popular was F. M. Pette's *The Palgrave Mummy* (1929). The plot centers around a series of deaths, after each of which blood appears on a mummy's throat. Much the same gimmick is used in Mary Gaunt's 1925 novel, *The Mummy Moves*.

No single work of mummy fiction ever achieved the stature or influence of the great horror novels (*Dracula*, *Frankenstein* or *Dr. Jekyll And Mr. Hyde*). collectively, mummy fiction developed all the themes and plot elements necessary to weave a horror legend, for both Im-Ho-Tep and Kharis.

The only plot element of the Kharis films not found in mummy fiction is the secret cult of Karnak/Arkam, enduring through the millennia, protecting the secrets of their gods. This plot device is a favorite of Saturday serials (such as Bela Lugosi's serial *The Return Of Chandu*, which like the Kharis series, revolves around the discovery of a princess' mummy), and was revived in *Indiana Jones And The Last Crusade*, whose ancient knights guard the Holy Grail. The priests of Karnak/Arkam differ from the other secret cults - they are not zealous fanatics, at least not for long. In film after film Andoheb dispatches them to fulfill the will of the Gods, and they always betray their vows. Or are they fulfilling Kharis' desires, if not his will? Did Kharis, the most tragic of all the Universal monsters, ultimately have his revenge on the Gods?■

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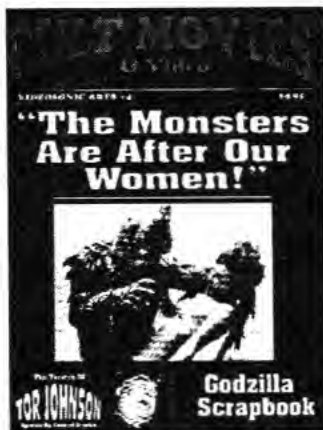
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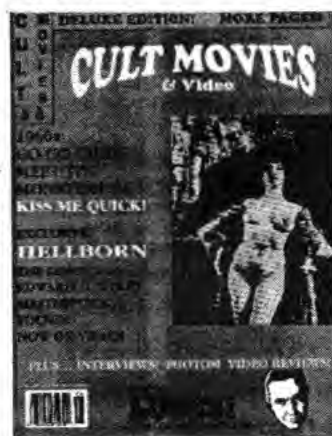


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“Murderous Midgets And Crippled Thieves...” Tod Browning, Hollywood, And The Twenties By David J. Skal and Elias Savada

Cult Movies is pleased to present the following chapter from Dark Carnival, the new Tod Browning biography by David J. Skal and Elias Savada, just published by Anchor Books/Doubleday.

As the story picks up, Browning, whose alcoholism has already killed one man and nearly destroyed his career and marriage, re-establishes himself at the newly formed Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer studios, thanks to the support of his former champion at Universal, Irving Thalberg....

Following his soggy fall from grace at Universal, Browning didn't hit bottom immediately; still drinking, he managed to negotiate a one-picture deal with Goldwyn Pictures, with an option on three additional films. The first picture was salaried at \$15,000; the additional photoplays, if they materialized, would pay him \$20,000 apiece plus 20% of the net profits. If the first option went smoothly, Goldwyn was willing to pay Browning \$25,000 a picture, again with 20% of the profits, for four more projects. Goldwyn set a cap of \$135,000 on any of the pictures; overruns were to be deducted from Browning's share of the profits.

All in all, it was an astonishingly good contract for a director deemed dysfunctional by a rival studio, offering him an easy shot at a \$100,000 annual salary. It was a far cry from his vaudeville days of skipping town on debts to his mother-in-law, and sharing lodgings with desperate, infanticidal women. Instead of being buried alive in carnival river-silt, he was being offered the opportunity to be buried alive in money. Needless to say, he had to actually produce the pictures, and forge a congenial relationship with Goldwyn in the process. But in his present alcoholic state of mind, it was impossible.

The December 1925 issue of *Picture Play* magazine presented the closest thing to a candid account of Browning's smash-up and recovery that has survived. Except for the occasional, opinionated newspaper reviewer, there were no really independent film journalists at the time, and certainly no investigative Hollywood reporting; the fan magazines existed primarily as adjuncts to the studio publicity mills, and stories like Myrtle Gebhart's "Because a Woman Believed" were highly controlled exercises in public relations - hardly investigative reporting. But because the article remains the single seeming example in Browning's career of a self-revelatory interview (however guarded and studio-sanitized)

it still commands interest and is worth citing at length.

"Two years ago, I went to smash," Browning told the *Picture Play* reporter. "Temperament, impulse, wanting my own way, stubbornness - there were a number of contributing factors." He admitted to having "rows" with "the company with which I was then associated." Browning believed he might have been "partly in the right" in these fights with Goldwyn (Gebhart doesn't mention the studio by name), "for at that time they were in a grand, internal mix-up, changing executives, each man bringing in ideas of his own. There were a dozen people a director had to please, with little chance of doing anything the way he wanted." Trouble began with his first Goldwyn assignment. June Mathis, a senior scenarist - who had just been assigned the task of cutting von Stroheim's 18-reel *Greed* (1923) down to size, and would be a major creative force on *Ben-Hur* (1925) - listened politely to Browning's idea for his first picture. Although she called his original story concept "very excellent," Mathis nonetheless "suggested to him that with all the other directors doing stories that were well-known, I thought for his own sake it would be very foolish for him to do a story that was unknown, and he agreed with me." Mathis was pushing for Browning to direct a Goldwyn property called *The Captain of Souls*, based on Charles Tenney Jackson's 1910

novel *The Day of Souls*, a redemption story set in turn-of-the-century bohemian San Francisco. The rights to the story had been purchased for an extremely high sum - over \$20,000 - and the studio was eager to make use of it. Browning resisted, telling Mathis that he liked the story but wasn't sure it was the commercial knockout he wanted his first picture for Goldwyn to be, but would like to consider it for the future. Mathis gave him an alternative script with the unpromising title *The Gambling Chaplain*, as well as synopses of properties with the similarly unappetizing titles of *It Is The Law*, *Those Who Dance*, and *The New Deluge*. Two days later, another Goldwyn executive expressed skepticism that Browning was being straight with Mathis. "Sometime at your convenience, I wish you would find out from Tod Browning, whether he really has any eagerness for ever doing [The] *Captain of Souls*," Abraham Lehr wrote to [Harry] Edington. "I may be wrong, but I suspect he is trying to let down Miss Mathis as easy as he can on a story he assumes she is crazy to have him do," Lehr wrote. "I know you will handle this diplomatically."

In the end, Browning was thrown together with Mathis, who, with scenarist Katherine Kavanaugh wrote him a faith-healing melodrama called *The Day of Faith* (1923), based on the novel by Arthur Somers Roche, originally serialized in *Collier's*. Browning managed to have the film's budget increased to

over \$250,000. Browning was forced to edit the film repeatedly to please the front office, presenting it in twelve, nine, and ten-reel cuts during August, 1923. Starring Eleanor Boardman and Tyrone Power, Sr., *The Day of Faith* received mixed, often lukewarm reviews, though Boardman's performance was especially praised. (In 1972, Boardman remembered only that "I was brand new, scared and found Mr. Browning unattractive.") Goldwyn had drawn blatant comparisons in its advertising to Lon Chaney's similarly-themed *The Miracle Man*, and thus let itself wide open for the *New York Herald's* critical salvo: "There was a great deal of slush in *The Miracle Man* but it was so completely disguised that the most carping observer could not easily resent it," the paper noted. However, "*The Day of Faith*...has borrowed all the slush from *The Miracle Man*, but has neglected to take with it any of the sincerity. The result is a picture that is preachy without being convincing; it aims at the emotions of its audience but is utterly unable to stir them." Other reviewers did manage to deem the drama stirring, but one senses their critical judgments were informed less by the merits of the film than they were polarized on the moral values politics then dividing Prohibition-era America. (An example of the film's acerbic dialogue, as a worldly gentleman

(continued)



Lon Chaney in *London After Midnight*.





Tod Browning and Lon Chaney in a publicity shot from *West of Zanzibar*.

chides the ingenue: "You modern flappers don't even know what needles are for." Her reply: "Why, I do too! They're for phonographs!" A film that extolled the value of faith must be good, ipso facto.

The *Herald* review concluded that *The Day of Faith* was "a sorry mess," a phrase that also described Browning's relations with Goldwyn. In the *Picture Play* interview, Browning admitted to a "reputation of being contrary and temperamental and uncertain. The rumor got around that I had a nasty disposition - and let me tell you, it was true!" He had grown used to autonomy on the lot. "I had always got what I wanted before. I wouldn't listen to reason. I was a stubborn as a mule - I wouldn't budge or make concessions, even when I knew inside that I was wrong. I quarreled constantly with the various and assorted swivel-chair bosses, and finally blew up and stalked out." Needless to say, Goldwyn exercised none of their contractual options on Browning's services.

Browning had hit bottom. He didn't acknowledge drinking as a contributing factor to his smash-up, though it was clearly recognized as such by all around him. Instead, he claimed to have "suddenly got sick of pictures, work, people, life, everything - and most of all myself. I didn't care what became of me. I drifted..." He recalled once having stayed "shut up in the house, alone, for three weeks, with scarcely anything to eat, barricaded by a sort of self-hatred. At times I would write feverishly - the melos I'd always wanted to write, with strange characters in unusual situations. Then, in a fit of despair, I would throw them into the wastebasket."

When his wife finally walked out ("There is just so much that a sensitive, well-bred woman will stand"), he missed her at first, in "practical" terms:

When you've been married to a woman for seven years, you get to take her presence and her work for granted. It was vaguely annoying, after she had gone, that my clothes weren't in shape, the house disorderly, and meals irregular. When things are going well, you never really notice the woman's efficient hand oiling the wheels out of sight. Men are antmalleable in the way they snuggle into comfort, but it seldom occurs to them to consider the work that goes into making their surroundings pleasant.

Beyond the household disorganization, Browning began to miss Alice in deeper ways, "her helpful talk, her suggestions, herself. I wanted to ask her advice about stories, and she wasn't there. And I

thought of our years together, of those fine dreams we had started out with, of her hopes in me and what a mess I had made of them."

When Browning finally acknowledged his alcoholism, he painted it, with no small measure of denial, as the result of his personal and professional problems, not a proximate cause. (Several years later he would make a more straightforward press statement about his attempt to drink up "all the bad liquor in the world.") One night, Browning told *Picture Play*, he was "moody, sunk in gloom. I got out a bottle of whiskey, and was just pouring a drink, when it suddenly occurred to me, 'No wonder Alice left a weak specimen like you.'"

In a moment of temperance-novel transformation, Browning said he "threw the bottle against the radiator, smashing it, said one brief prayer, 'God, help me to pull myself together!' and turned over and went to sleep. That sounds like a scene from an old melodrama, but it actually happened." Although he identified the incident as the beginning of his "a man's regeneration," he added that he didn't like the term because it was "usually applied to moral ruckers. Fortunately, I hadn't any immoral tendencies..." Needless to say, the subjects of Anna May Wong, and marital infidelity in general, never came up in the studio-sanctioned *Picture Play* interview. In the cleaned-up version of the story, Browning went to Alice the day following his whiskey-bottle Epiphany and asked her to take him back.

"If you want me," she told him, "you've got to prove it. I'll help, but it's up to you. I don't care to go down with a sinking ship." Browning had no choice but to court his wife all over again. She "let me call to see her, and take her to the theater." He became melodramatic in his resolve to woo her. "My trouble assumed, in my eyes, the proportions of a tragedy. Anyone connected with the make-believe professional world is subconsciously an actor. I was sincere, mind you, but I was sensitized to feel things in an exaggerated dramatic pitch." But Alice Browning didn't need histrionics. "She only smiled - that slow, lazy smile - and yawned, 'Why make a mountain out of a molehill, Tod? Surely, you'll make good. When you stop orating and get down to brass tacks again, I'll be waiting. In the meantime, let's have supper.'"

"By making it all prosaic," Browning said, "she brought me back to realities - the actualities upon which the only worthwhile life can be built." He admitted that he was only beginning dimly to sense

the emotional pain that Alice "must have concealed to keep things on a casual plane."

The *Picture Play* piece turned on a sentimental note of reassurance - rather like a formula Hollywood screenplay. In this case, the formula was the myth of the quietly powerful woman standing in the shadow of the successful man. "Women are much stronger than men, only it's a different strength," Browning said. "We men, physically powerful, swagger in this masculine braggadocio, believe we control things. But a frail little woman can make or break any one of us. The strongest man is a child, compared to a woman's spiritual backbone."

Alice Browning, in her husband's public recollection of the events, provided the strength and determination to reestablish him in Hollywood. ("From outward aspects, she is the sort that a man would feel needed protecting and babying," Browning said, "But under that sweet femininity, there is a firmness like granite...") With Alice's support, he managed to find employment from Spring to Fall of 1924 with F.B.O. Studios, a small operation adjacent to Paramount's lot which later became more famous as RKO Radio Pictures, as director of *Dollar Down*, a preachy story on the virtues of thrift, starring Ruth Roland and Henry B. Walthall; and *The Dangerous Flirt*, starring Evelyn Brent. (*The Dangerous Flirt* - ironically a story on the dangers of sexual naivete - may have been an unfortunate title; Mrs. Lucien Andriot, wife the film's cinematographer, remembered Browning as a moral rucker despite his newfound sobriety. "He was quite a lady's man," she recalled. Browning, she stated, was dating a woman other than his wife and other than Anna May Wong during the F.B.O. period. Mrs. Andriot declined to give the woman's name, but recalled her clearly as a friend of hers given acting bit parts by Browning. Tod and Alice's marriage may have continued to have problems besides his alcoholism.)

Neither of the first two F.B.O. pictures made waves; the second picture was, in fact, shelved for over a year, finally receiving a limited release to less than enthusiastic reviews. Nonetheless, Evelyn Brent recalled that Browning was impressive as a director. "I was scared when I first worked with him, because I'd heard the stories," she said. Her husband, Bernie Fineman, was a good friend of Browning's and also an executive at F.B.O., and had personally decided to give the director a second chance in the business. But Brent was relieved by the sobriety, courtesy and professionalism Browning exhibited at all times. Alice was at her husband's side constantly, a "very steady" presence. Brent remembered. "She kept her eye on everything," and even accepted an acting role in Browning's third and final F.B.O. film, *Silk Stocking Sal*, a crook drama again starring Evelyn Brent. Alice played a gang moll named "Gina, the wop." Brent noted that "Tod Browning was the first direc-



tor who made you use voice when you worked." In the silent films Brent had earlier worked in, "the actors would make up lines, just say anything, throw it away." But Browning, audaciously, asked actors to speak lines that corresponded with the story. "He was a good director," Brent said, "a damned good director."

The critics agreed with her, at least in terms of *Silk Stocking Sal*. Armed with tangible evidence of her husband's reliability, Alice went directly to the most powerful man in Hollywood who might be in a position to help her husband get back on his feet with major studio.

Irving Thalberg, who at Universal had initially championed Browning as director of *The Hunchback of Notre Dame*, had quit Carl Laemmle's employ when the mogul's attempts to arrange a marriage between Thalberg and his moonstruck daughter, Rosabelle, were rebuffed. According to Samuel Marx, Thalberg wasn't particularly interested in Rosabelle in the first place; his protective mother, Henrietta, opposed a wedding partially because of fears that "the sexual requirements of marriage would exhaust his fragile strength."

Laemmle was outraged at Thalberg's rejection of his first-born child. He responded by denying Thalberg a long-promised promotion and raise. Thalberg responded by accepting a new position with Louis B. Mayer Productions, founded two years earlier. While Mayer was hardly Laemmle's equal, Thalberg's timing was fortuitous - Mayer was on the verge of a monumental merger between his own company, the Metro Pictures Corporation, and the Goldwyn Picture Corporation, which, under the control of the theatre-chain giant Loew's, Inc., would result in the most powerful, glamorous, and ultimately legendary motion picture studio in Hollywood history - Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer.

In order to feed the ever-expanding empire of Loew's theatres with weekly products, M-G-M became an enormous consumer of literary properties. The story that Browning was keen to sell to Thalberg was a curious, though best-selling novel by Clarence Aaron "Tod" Robbins, first published in 1917. *The Unholy Three* had languished in Hollywood, however, due to its outre subject: a triumvirate of side-show denizens - a midget who masquerades as a baby, a strong-man giant and a cross-dressing ventriloquist - social outsiders all, who join forces to create a crime syndicate in miniature. Hollywood's hesitation to capitalize on Robbins' tremendously popular book may be attributed to the novel's failure to conform to crook story conventions in the cinema, or to the mystery-melodrama formulas then all the rage in the theatre. Browning later related that he had been told "You can't make an audience seriously believe in a crook dressed up as an old woman and a dwarf disguised as a baby...the stuffs comedy. Mack Sennett might use it and get a million laughs, but for the mystery drama - impossible." But Browning, who deeply believed in the book's potential, thought otherwise.

Upon the novel's initial publication, *The New York Times Book Review* noted that, while undeniably a crime tale, *The Unholy Three* "is not a detective story. The reader is almost immediately let in on the secret, so that its discovery in the end awakens no thrill of surprise." *The Book Review* predicted that the novel would appeal less to mystery aficionados than to "those who find enjoyment in tales of blood-freezing, if incredible, vindictiveness."

The Unholy Three recounts the story of a trio of dime-museum denizens, Tweedledee, a midget; Hercules, a strong man; and Echo, a ventriloquist whose identity is psychologically blurred with that of his dummy, Tweedledee, seething with rage at the injustice of being trapped in a "child's" body, enlists the other two - both truly child-like, and easily controlled - in a campaign of criminal retribution against the "normal" (i.e., adult) world. Tweedledee assumes the guise of a helpless baby; Echo dresses as a kindly grandmother, the better to catch victims unaware. Hercules provides the muscle to carry out their schemes. Together they constitute a composite master criminal - one mind, one body, and one voice.

The opening chapter of *The Unholy Three* is still powerful in its evocation of pure spleen:

All that he asked - all that he had ever asked -



Caricature of Bela Lugosi from *The 13th Chair*.

was to be taken seriously; and yet no one had granted him this simple wish. Most had laughed, some had pitied, but none had understood - none had looked upon him as a human being, like themselves. No, he had been a doll, a plaything for all these vulgar children of the world - children who paid to see him move his head, open his mouth and speak - children quite careless of the inner workings of their doll - children of the materialistic world. And, as he had grown older, the inner workings of this doll had changed; strange transformations had taken place; the springs of good had corroded with rust; and soon the green mould of evil covered everything.

The midget is especially revolted by children, who reflect himself as in a glass, darkly: "Their piping voices, their pointed fingers, their curious eyes - all filled him with a nauseating hatred hard to bear. At the sight of them, he felt tempted to spring forward, to dig his finger-nails into their soft flesh, to hurl them to the ground to stamp them into unrecognizable bloody heaps."

It is hard to read these passages from a book that so seized Browning's imagination without wondering at their resonance with his own childhood, when Tod himself strutted on a backyard stage, projecting an assumed persona for public approval; when he was touted to all the world as an "infant

phenomenon" for the delectation of judgmental non-infants. Children will do almost anything to bargain with the unmitigated power adults wield over them; the smile reflex in infants, for instance, is not so much an expression of affection as it is a mindless Darwinian trait; babies who smile - or, by extension, who sing, or tap-dance, or otherwise entertain - are cared for better, and so have improved their chances of survival in a hostile world of "giant" adults; infant phenomena often perform against a live-or-die backdrop of raw existential panic. Browning's description of his frustration with studio authority figures strongly echoes the perverse power dynamic of the midget Tweedledee in his volcanic contempt for the very notion of audience approval: "It grew warm in the tent. It was as though these people, this herd of sweating animals, were sucking the precious air through their great, gaping mouths; were taking it from Tweedledee. His breast rose and fell; he leaned back, sick and dizzy...he felt that his over strained nerves were giving away."

Browning's nerves, finally, had given away, in part from his thwarted attempts to deal with the quasi-parental authority of the studios, in part from an infantilizing, oral addiction to alcohol. The 1915 car accident had left him with a toothless baby-mouth he would never outgrow, as well as other injuries, which, according to George E. Marshall, to some extent inhibited his physical activities as an adult. It is hardly surprising that Browning found the story of entertainment outcasts in *The Unholy Three* powerfully attractive as he tried to reassert his own power and influence in the film industry.

Thalberg also like *The Unholy Three*, and purchased the screen rights for \$10,000. (John Robbins, son of the novelist, insisted in 1972 that his father was actually paid half that amount, and that the sale was facilitated by Tod Robbins' boyhood friend, M-G-M art director Cedric Gibbons. The younger Robbins said his father "was never within 3,000 miles of Hollywood in his lifetime" and never met or corresponded with Browning, even after the huge success of the picture.) The producer had lavished tremendous attention on Lon Chaney's *The Hunchback of Notre Dame* at Universal, and knew the box-office value of grotesque themes just as surely as he recognized the public's craving for glamour.

In all likelihood it was Thalberg who had originally thought of pairing Browning and Chaney for *Hunchback*. Physically limited himself, Thalberg "may have come to think of himself as something of a freak," according to his biographer Roland Flamin. Freakishness, deformity, and disability had taken root as a staple of American entertainment in the years following World War I; it is difficult to ignore the parallels between the cinema's ongoing obsession with disability and the real social problem of a quarter million disabled American soldiers who returned to find limited employment opportunities in an otherwise thriving economy. A sense of "disability" also pervaded the ranks of non-injured veterans, who as a group were disproportionately unemployed during the twenties; the plight of "the forgotten man" would not be effectively addressed by the government until the onset of the Great Depression. Lon Chaney's seething depictions of maimed and marginalized characters reflected the resentment of a significant population segment; on a broader level, Chaney's endlessly metamorphosing persona touched millions more who struggled with their own sense of identity in a decade of bewildering and rapid social change.

Thalberg warily offered Browning a one-picture contract to direct Lon Chaney in *The Unholy Three* at a salary of \$6,500 - less than half his compensation at Goldwyn - payable \$750 a week for six weeks, with the \$2,000 balance due upon the film's completion. An incentive bonus of \$3,500 was added, provided Browning completed the picture within the twenty-four allotted shooting days and within the studio's estimated budget of \$103,192.37. If Browning satisfactorily fulfilled the contract, the studio had the option to contract him for three additional films on the same terms, and a second option for four additional pictures at an increased salary of \$10,000 per picture with a completion bonus of \$5,000 for each film.

(continued)



sheer novelty of the story and the audacity of its telling. In terms of American popular culture, the freak-show outlaws of *The Unholy Three* are significant precursors of the bizarrely theatrical villains of *Batman* and *Dick Tracy*. As Tweedledee, Harry Earles is especially impressive, his sudden shifts from squalling infant to cigar-chomping gangster are simultaneously hilarious and appalling. Earles is perhaps at his creepiest in the scenes where the mask of a smiling baby blurs with true, criminal countenance – as in the moment where he gestures greedily from his baby carriage for an emerald necklace incautiously dangled in his direction.

On another level,

At Metro, Thalberg was able to follow his original instinct at Universal to pair Browning with Lon Chaney – the actor had just finished principal photography on Universal's *The Phantom of the Opera* when he signed a long-term agreement with M-G-M. But *The Unholy Three* presented certain script difficulties; in order to function as a star vehicle for Lon Chaney, the narrative focus needed to be transferred from the midget to a character that Chaney could plausibly perform: in this case the cross-dressing ventriloquist, Echo. Waldemar Young's screenplay transformed Echo from a split-personality who could only speak through his false personae, to the story's calculating mastermind.

Beyond this essential transposition, much of Robbins' original nastiness was maintained. In the opening scene in the dime museum, there is some surprising pre-Production Code double entendre: a hoochy-kooch artist, for instance, is introduced as a girl who "broke the Sultan's thermometer." And the scene in which the ill-tempered Tweedledee (Harry Earles, stage name of the German midget actor Kurt Schneider) kicks a gawking child in the face, bloodying him, still shocks. The threesome was completed by actor Victor McLaglen as Hercules ("the mighty...marvelous...mastodonic model of muscular masculinity," according to the film's side-show spieler.)

The plot of *The Unholy Three* concerns the trio's scheme to rob wealthy victims by establishing the front of a pet store, run by Echo in old-lady drag who pushes around an equally bogus infant (Earles) in a pram. They sell phony talking parrots, made voluble only by Echo's ventriloquial art; their "speech" is amusingly indicated by the superimposition of comic strip-style dialogue balloons (anticipating the graphically-rendered onomatopoeia of television's *Batman* four decades later.) The birds' failure at utterance provides a convenient excuse for Echo and Tweedledee to make personal visits to the complaining owners – and to case their homes in the process.

But the first crime, a Christmas Eve theft of jewels from a pillar of the community named John Arlington (Charles Wellesley), goes horribly awry. Arlington's infant daughter (Violet Crane) discovers Hercules and Tweedledee in front of the Christmas tree. "Oh, Santa Claus," she exclaims happily to the strong man in Young's first draft of the script, "you brought me a little bruvver!" The "bruvver" is not amused, however, and when the girl tries to kiss him, violently chokes her in front of the Christmas tree. The scene was filmed as scripted, but finally cut by Metro before release on the grounds

that it was too intense for 1925 audiences. The excision of the scene, however, paradoxically made it all the more comfortable for Metro to indicate – via the insertion of a newspaper headline – that the little girl had actually been killed, rather than merely injured, as in Young's original scenario.

The unwholesome threesome frames the pet store's bookkeeper, Regan (Matthew Betz), with whom Echo's pickpocket moll, Rosie O'Grady (Mae Busch) has forged a romantic attachment. Although Echo also is in love with Rosie, he realizes the evil of his ways, and uses his ventriloquist powers to project exculpatory testimony in the mouth of his rival Regan during his trial. Hercules and Tweedledee, holed up in a mountain cabin, are dispatched by a crazed ape, one of the pet store's disgruntled denizens.

The Unholy Three proved a box-office sensation. "Not often does one see so powerful a photodrama as *The Unholy Three*," wrote Mordaunt Hall of the *New York Times*, which later selected the film as one of the ten best of 1925. Hall called the film "a startling original achievement which takes its place with the very best productions ever made." It was only the beginning of a deluge of uniform raves. The *New York Sun* praised the film's "wealth of cinematic imagination...*The Unholy Three* is atmospheric, striking, and gorgeously exciting." The *New Yorker* gave Browning an especially warm vindication of his comeback vehicle, the impact of which it compared to:

...a kick equivalent to a cocktail concocted from red-eye, coal-dust, and squirrel whiskey... To Mr. Tod Browning, all honor. His direction is replete with the gruesome, the humorous, and the plain hardboiled. He has distilled grotesque melodramatic comedy and has deftly built up a thing that kaleidoscopes a ghoul-ish combination of cruelty and hard laughter, irony and action. And how easily he might have fallen into the ordinary cinema traps and made of the picture mere crook junk! In fact, he has risen far above the story, which is, especially at the end, as full of holes as a sieve and again has proved the old Shakespearean adage that "the direction's [sic] the thing."

The Unholy Three's production cost of \$114,000 yielded M-G-M a spectacular profit of \$328,000, even after deduction of general studio overhead. The film generated a total of \$704,000 in domestic and foreign rentals, instantly reestablishing Browning as a commercial player in Hollywood.

The film's popularity is not surprising, given the

Chaney, emasculated in geriatric drag, may have provided a kind of a moral bulwark for the masses who didn't live in cosmopolitan centers like New York or Hollywood, in a sense guarding them against the threatening tide of moral license that American show business was everywhere else extolling: Chaney's appeal was, to a large extent, based on a martyrdom of enforced chastity. Unlike virtually every other male star in Hollywood, Chaney almost never got the girl – the commercial glue that held Browning and Chaney together for the next four years was their mutual interest in themes of boiling sexual frustration and concomitant, visceral revenge. Together they would provide the free-spirited Jazz Age with a profoundly reactionary shadow-ethos. Irving Thalberg, in essence, recognized the profitability of Hollywood assuming the role of moral good cop and bad cop, playing not only to the public's appetite for extravagant sex fantasy, but to its puritanical resistance as well.

On March 2, 1925, M-G-M exercised its first, three-picture option on Browning's services, raising his per-picture salary to \$10,000 (\$6,500 plus \$3,500 bonus). Shortly thereafter, Tod and Alice made a whirlwind pilgrimage to Louisville, the only confirmed visit with his family following his Hollywood success. Jennie Browning Block's two surviving children, Helen Polsgrove and Alice Carnell, recalled that they and their older siblings received cash gifts from the Brownings ranging between five and fifteen dollars. "We thought we were millionaires." Tod presented his mother with a fur coat, as well as one of the first commercially-manufactured radio receivers. Alice Carnell described Alice Browning's shopping spree at a local store called Sellman's: "She bought three long dresses and paid



two hundred dollars apiece for them - we never heard such a thing in our lives!" The Block sisters recalled that Tod and Alice "stayed no longer than two or three days" before flying directly back to Los Angeles. And they were left with a sense of a jealous estrangement between their mother, and Tod and Avery - an emotional issue which Jennie never discussed with her children. She only told them that Charles and Lydia Browning had taken pains to treat their foster daughter as an equal member of the family - an evenhandedness, perhaps, that the brothers resented, feeling they were entitled by birth to more. Following their father's death, Tod and Avery convinced Jennie to sell them her equity in what would eventually be the siblings' estate when Lydia died. With the family residence, a flat building up the block at 2221-2223 West Main Street (where Jennie raised her family) and a one-fourth interest in property handed down from Samuel Browning, the value of the family real estate alone was \$8,900. Jennie accepted a flat payment of \$1,900 for her future claim sometime before June 2, 1923. Legally, they now owed her nothing.

Back in the film colony, his family obligations to some extent fulfilled, or at least endured, Browning launched his next project, *The Mystic*. Using an original story by Browning, screenwriter Waldemar Young recycled plot elements that had made such a hit in *The Unholy Three*, most notably the basic setup of carnivalesque criminals involved in a highly theatrical scam. Michael Nash (Conway Tearle), an American crook in Hungary, induces Zara, a carnival fortuneteller (Aileen Pringle) and her followers to accompany him stateside to bilk an heiress out of a fortune. Their technique: a phony seance in which the girl's dead father "instructs" her to turn over her securities and jewels. Following several showy sequences demonstrating the elaborate methods of fraudulent mediums, Nash renounces criminality and manages to escape with Zara back to Hungary.

The Mystic was especially distinguished by the costumers of the famous French designer Romain de Tiroff - otherwise known, internationally, as Erte. Later memorably described by a *New York Times* retrospective as "an Aubrey Beardsley who mastered the Fox-trot and occasionally broke into the Charleston," Erte had been imported by Louis B. Mayer at great expense to create costumes and decor for two planned films, *Paris* and *Monte Carlo*. Mayer took extraordinary pains employed to make the artiste comfortable: one was the detailed recreation on the M-G-M lot of Erte's atelier in Sevrès, down to the smallest architectural details; another was a gift of a Packard autocar. According to Mayer biographer Charles Higham, "Despite the fact that Erte was, to say the least, outre, Mayer was fasci-



West of Zanzibar, 1928.

nated by him. Erte turned up at the studio in rose and gray crepe de chine or crimson and black brocaded coats and gold pants, or gray suits with red stripes..."

Erte wasn't the only dandy on the M-G-M lot. Tod Browning himself had become a sartorial peacock, favoring boldly patterned suits, berets and bowler hats, two-toned shoes, and a theatrically-waxed mustache in the manner of Agatha Christie's Hercule Poirot. When the scripts for *Paris* and *Monte Carlo* failed to materialize on schedule, Erte had nothing to do besides designing some specialty costumes for *Ben-Hur* (1925). Mayer finally threw both his leading fashion plates together, assigned Erte to Browning's unit for *The Mystic*.

"Half the clothes were to be Gypsy costumes," Erte recalled, "the others were elaborate and sumptuous gowns." But as executed by M-G-M's costume department, the finished product met with Erte's disapproval. "I felt the clothes lacked allure," he wrote. Mayer responded by setting up a workshop dedicated to Erte's designs alone. "He found the

most marvelous woman to run it. Although her name was Madam Van Horn, she was thoroughly French; everything she touched emerged incredibly chic. The workshop was staffed by Mexicans whose work was superb."

Since *The Mystic* was being filmed in black and white, it made sense to Erte that he should provide black and white designs. But here he discovered a Hollywood peculiarity: "It seemed that actors became bored if they were not surrounded by colors, and their boredom would be reflected in their eyes." He relented, and executed color renderings which he viewed through a tinted blue glass to gauge their effect in monochrome.

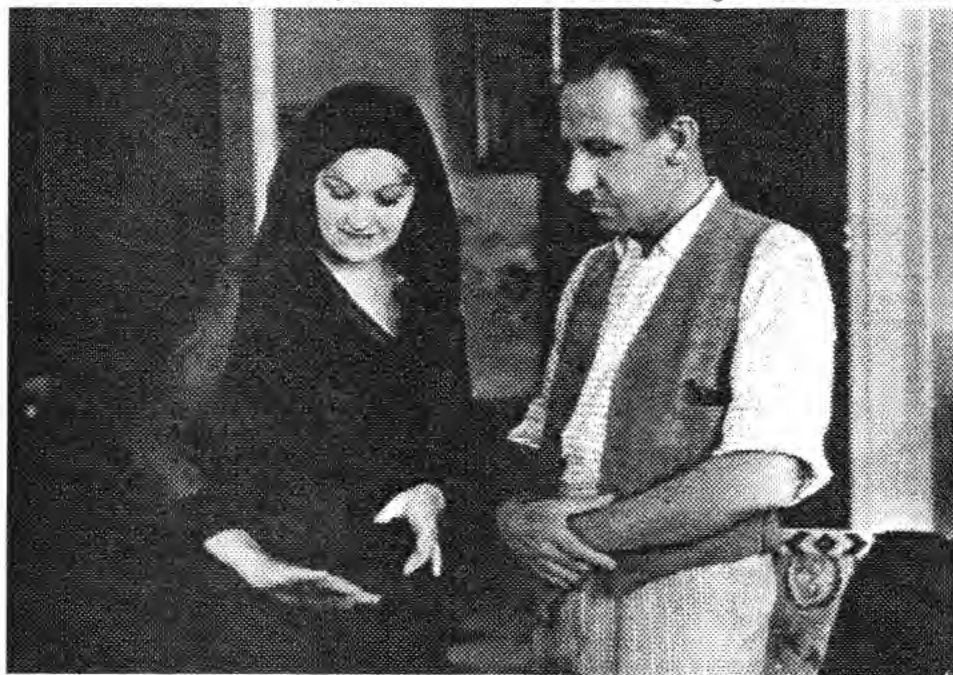
Like Tod Browning, Erte was powerfully drawn to the cinema's potential for the strange and unreal. As he wrote in his autobiography:

My dream was to make a film fantasy. After all, hadn't the cinema evolved from that series of bizarre pictures which had originated in the fertile imagination of Georges Melies, pioneer film-maker, inventor and magician? But it was The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari, produced by Erich Pommer in Germany in 1919, that had first fired my enthusiasm for the possibilities of the film medium, especially in the realm of fantasy.

Unfortunately, a shared interest in the fantastic did not foster a good relationship between Browning and the designer. According to Aileen Pringle, Erte knew about dresses, but not about pictures, and Browning didn't know anything about dresses. The designer concocted a fanciful creation in black satin, including a dramatic jet hoop and tassel. The effect was visually stunning, but sadly impractical; when she attempted to act, the whole thing ripped after she took a single step. Browning started screaming, calling Erte a "fucking incompetent fairy," Pringle recalled. The director chased the designer off the set and the actress never saw Erte again.

Browning's work, beginning with *The Unholy Three* and continuing with *The Mystic*, showed abundant signs of *Caligari's* influence. The German film, produced by Pommer and directed by Robert Wiene, had been released in the United States by Samuel Goldwyn in 1921: its dreamlike story of a carnival mountebank who carries a murderous zombie from town to town in a coffin-crate was unlike anything American audiences had ever seen. For Browning, of course, *Caligari* could not fail to have resonated with his own history as the Living Hypnotic Corpse of the Ohio and Mississippi rivers. With its daring expressionistic settings - still, arguably,

(continued)



The 13th Chair, 1929.

the most instantly recognizable designs in the history of film – *Caligari* created a tremendous early-1920s debate over the artistic future of motion pictures. The Europeans had gravitated toward the uncanny from the cinema's inception; in America, however, where movies owed more to vaudeville traditions than to the legitimate theatre or to literature, cinema seemed stalled at a window-on-the-world kind of literalism. The motion picture itself had originally been a turn-of-the-century tent-show attraction, its appeal based on novelty, strangeness, an encounter with the uncanny. Hollywood, nonetheless, continued to resist symbolic, supernatural themes – throughout the twenties, the appearance of magical events, ghosts, or monsters would almost always be "explained away" as the materialistic machinations of some master criminal, a plot to steal an inheritance, etc. It was Tod Browning, who, almost single-handedly – if with frequent assist from Lon Chaney – would push the envelope of the weirdly impossible to its acceptable outer limits in the commercial studio system of the 1920s. *The Mystic*, though it purported to "expose" spiritualism, nonetheless capitalized on the public's persistent interest in occult themes. In effect, the reductionistic dynamic of the machine age was being teased from both ends – a cynically materialistic world view versus a desperate craving for spiritual transcendence. The numbing horrors of World War I had introduced a deep note of cultural pessimism/nihilism into the twenties, with results ranging from the fractured nightmares of surrealism to the frantic, live-it-up ethos of the jazz age.

The designer Erte, whatever he thought of the director personally, was amazed by the surreality of Tod Browning's Hollywood. The studios constituted "a world of fantasy in themselves. There were royal facades without palaces; sumptuous interiors without walls, kings and queens in full regalia eating sandwiches in the cafeteria with beggars in rags." He wondered at the Prohibition-era spectacle every weekend, when "half the population of Hollywood set off for the Mexican frontier town of Tijuana...to get drunk. The road from the border to Hollywood on a Sunday evening had to be seen to be believed; it was crowded bumper to bumper with cars manned by inebriated drivers." In addition to the partying, there was also a fair deal of orgy-ing. "I went only to one but I left sickened – and I'm no prude," he recalled in his memoirs. Erte also noted "a great deal of drug-taking."

Willard Sheldon, a then-recent high school graduate getting his first taste of feature-filmmaking with *The Mystic*, served as assistant cameraman to cinematographer Ira H. Morgan. In a 1994 interview he recalled his youthful baptism in the pre-union rigors of M-G-M, where twelve to fourteen hour days were considered the norm. Willard said that "many days I slept in the prop room where the beds were." The grueling hours, of course, enabled M-G-M to deliver a new motion picture every week, fifty-two weeks a year. "If you collapsed, they'd just bring in someone else and keep shooting," Sheldon said. Browning could be pleasant enough off the set, but at work he was "like an iron man. I still remember the way he paced back and forth, staring at you." Sheldon characterized Browning as "a man who knew what he wanted, and got what he wanted." He remembered the director as being "a rough man to work with...he never wanted to break for lunch. When he got hungry – that's when we would break for lunch, sometimes it would be as late as four o'clock in the afternoon. There were no unions then and a director could do exactly what he wanted." *The Mystic* achieved Browning's goal of maintaining his viability as a contract director at M-G-M, though just barely. While the film did better than break even, its profit of \$52,000 amounted to barely a quarter of *The Unholy Three's* thundering success. Nonetheless, the press response was fairly laudatory – save for the *New York Herald Tribune's* particularly nasty pan, calling the film "one of the dullest, most annoying pictures we ever sat through."

"The amazing events which take place during the seances make very good screen material," noted the *New York Evening Post*, "and melodrama, as many people have said week in and week out until their throats are beginning to hurt, is something the screen should do more often, but doesn't seem to



The 13th Chair.

do very well even when it tries. Perhaps Mr. Tod Browning will be able to put film melodrama on a new basis. He has an excellent start."

Following *Variety's* suggestion that *The Mystic* might make an excellent stage melodrama, *Moving Picture World* reported that New York producers were indeed negotiating with Browning and M-G-M for legitimate rights, though nothing ever came of the story. For a time, in the twenties, Hollywood seemed enamored of the notion that it might be able to profitably sell stage rights to its successful films; Universal, for instance, announced that Lon Chaney was preparing to tour on stage as *The Hunchback of Notre Dame* following the success of the 1923 film. But given the financial realities of the theatre versus those of Hollywood, one must wonder if these kinds of announcements were made only for publicity purposes. That a star of Lon Chaney's magnitude would even consider touring from city to city, nightly repeating the physical tortures of his *Hunchback* characterization defies credibility.

Browning again teamed with Chaney for *The Black Bird* (1926), in which Waldemar Young's screenplay, based on a story by Browning, once more played to the public's appetite for Chaney in states of disability and disfigurement. Chaney's films, it should be noted, are not the only examples of disability-drenched cinema in the 1920s. John Barrymore's peg-legged Ahab in *The Sea Beast* (1926) and his hunchback in the *Francesca da Rimini*-inspired *Drums of Love* (1928) are two examples; characters and/or plots hinging on paralysis, blindness and twisted spines were features variously in films like D.W. Griffith's *The Orphans of the Storm* (1921), Henry King's *Tol'able David* (1921), Rex Ingram's *The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse* (1921) and *The Magician* (1926); Frank Capra's *The Strong Man* (1926), and even Herbert Brenon's *Peter Pan* (1924), with the villainous amputee Captain Hook providing a sugar-coated counterpoint to Lon Chaney's stock characterizations.

The Black Bird is another crook-scum story, this time set in the seedy Limehouse district of London and featuring Chaney as a master criminals called the Black Bird. He covers his crimes by assuming the identity of a "twin brother" known as the Bishop,

the kindly, cruelly palsied head of a mission who uses the charity operation and his faked disability as elaborate fronts for the Black Bird's crimes. The Black Bird and another crook, West End Bertie (Owen Moore) vie for the affections of a music hall performer, Fifi (Renee Adoree); the ensuing melodrama takes an O. Henry turn when the Black Bird is actually paralyzed in a police raid, and dies having truly become his false persona.

As in *The Unholy Three*, Browning managed to transform preposterous premise into convincing entertainment, at least for the space of an hour. In many ways, Browning's plots resembled traditional tall tales, the success of which was judged not on inherent plausibility, but rather on the teller's skill in distracting an audience from the essential irrationality of the narrative.

In other words, Browning's success – much like that of his characters – was knowing how to put over a con-job. To this end, he favored a complete artificiality in art direction, lighting and photography. The *New York Sun* praised *The Black Bird*, noting the director's growing penchant for a dark, controlled ambience: "It has been pointed out before that Mr. Browning, in order to keep his little crime waves in a shadowy fantastic key, pictures all the action in front of dimly lighted sets, against shadowy walls...there is not a touch of Mother Nature, not a hint of sunshine, or sky or trees..."

Despite a fair amount of favorable critical attention, *The Black Bird*, like *The Mystic*, once more failed to repeat the success of *The Unholy Three*, and posted a profit of \$263,000, good but nowhere near the levels of other Chaney vehicles at Metro like Victor Seastrom's *He Who Gets Slapped* (1924, \$349,000), *The Unholy Three*, and, most spectacularly, Universal's *The Phantom of the Opera*, which ended \$539,682 in the black. Part of the problems with *The Mystic* and *The Black Bird* may have been the ultimately mechanical nature of Browning's self-developed stories. Much of best work had derived from novels, stories and plays with far more fully-realized characterizations and literary textures than he was capable of generating on his own. Despite taking frequent credit for original stories, no treatment or manuscript has yet come to light that is solely Browning's work.

But to whatever extent he shaped his scripts, he was unique among directors of the period. Agent Phil Berg, who represented most of M-G-M's directors in the late twenties (though not Browning) offered that "Tod was one who really looked for material...most of the bunch never looked for a story...they were only assigned [a script], sometimes only three weeks before they started shooting." Berg felt that "Tod was a very peculiar guy" for not having an agent, but admitted that there was little an agent could do for a director who wasn't interested in branching out from a narrow groove of offbeat films.

Nonetheless, Browning had an unerring instinct for building the big, melodramatic moment, and a clear understanding that audiences would respond predictably to tense, exaggerated situations. Sometimes he pushed too far: *The Black Bird's* cleverness in particular veered dangerously close to farce, with Chaney's relentless quick-change transformations taking place frantically behind slamming doors.

Metro nonetheless was sufficiently impressed with Browning's work to renegotiate his 1924 contract, more than doubling his compensation. On January 8, 1926, Louis B. Mayer signed a new agreement for five additional photoplays, guaranteeing Browning \$20,000 per picture, plus a \$5,000 bonus for each project delivered on time and within budget. Buoyed by Mayer's faith and money, Browning seems to have been freed to follow his own instincts to a greater extent than ever before, inaugurating the most personal, obsessive, and bizarre chapter in his career.

For his next project, Browning had a story collaborator whose contributions may have had a lasting salutary effect on the remainder of the Browning/Chaney oeuvre. Herman J. Mankiewicz, the New York journalist, theatre critic, and member of the celebrated Algonquin Round Table, had accepted a position with M-G-M as a scenario writer. Mankiewicz was one of several writers of the *New Yorker*/Algonquin axis who gravitated to Hollywood

in the twenties; others included Charles Brackett, Robert Benchley, Dorothy Parker, and Nunnally Johnson. As Pauline Kael observed, Hollywood was probably an inevitable destination for the Algonquin group, who were "fast, witty writers, used to regarding their work not as deathless prose but as stories written to order for the market..." Mankiewicz initially expected to write a screenplay based on his wartime experiences in the Marines. The *New York Times* noted the "perverseness" of the studio's decision to put another writer on the war story once Mankiewicz had arrived, "as though the studio authorities were utterly surprised that Mr. Mankiewicz should want to write about something with which he was familiar." Instead, he was assigned to work with Tod Browning, whose improvisatory methods of concocting screen stories must have struck the Manhattan literateur as proof positive that the words "Hollywood writer" constituted an oxymoron. Indeed, he was informed that prose of any kind — deathless or not — might not even be a consideration on a Browning film. Howard Dietz, then M-G-M's head of advertising and exploitation, recalled a meeting between Mankiewicz and Browning in which the director half-described and half-acted a scene for a proposed Chaney vehicle ("This is going to be the greatest movie I've ever made.") that never came to fruition. Browning knew the kinds of images he wanted — the story was to concern the transplanting of women's head onto apes, and vice versa. The problem was, he didn't have a scrap of narrative rationale for the outlandish theme.

Dietz remembered Browning's pitch to Mankiewicz: "You don't have to write anything — just answer one question correctly and you'll get screen credit."

Browning then related the scene:

It opens with Lon Chaney wearing a white wig and an inwerness cape, playing The Last Rose of Summer on the violin. He is blind and has a tin cup hooked onto him, and the crowd divides before him as he slowly walks into a measured tempo while scratching away at his fiddle. He continues on his way and suddenly darts down five or six steps in front of a brownstone house. He taps a mysterious code on the door and rings a doorbell in between taps. The door is opened. We hear strange screams from inside. [Metro, by this time, was recording synchronized music and sound effects for its silent films.] Lon Chaney removes his white wig and inwerness cape and appears in a complete surgical outfit. He enters the room from which the screams emerge, the screams get louder and Chaney gets covered with blood. The prison-like cells are filled. We see him cutting off the heads of a dozen nude ladies. He also cuts off the heads of a dozen apes.

The director's dilemma: "What business is he in that he wants to do this?"

The writer, apparently, had no answer — one can only speculate on the tart retort Dorothy Parker might have mustered — and the film was never made.

It was just about this time that Mankiewicz sent a telegram to his friend Ben Hecht in New York: "Millions are to be grabbed out here and your only competition is idiots. Don't let this get around."

Mankiewicz shared an original story credit with Browning for *The Road to Mandalay* (1926) — a pretentiously named film if there ever was, having nothing at all to do with the celebrated Rudyard Kipling poem of the same title, but obviously happy to bask in its reputation. But *The Road to Mandalay* nonetheless proved a creative turning point in Browning's career, in which the stock elements of his previous work — exotic locales, criminality, secret identities, love triangles, and the all-important element of a physical anomaly — were given a dark psychological resonance Browning had not been able to achieve since *The Unholy Three*. Mankiewicz possessed both the cynical literary sophistication of a mid-twenties Manhattanite, as well as an awareness of the literary/dramatic implications of Freudian theory. Mankiewicz, with his younger brother Joseph, had both lived in Berlin during the 1920s and "were familiar with the currents of psychoanalytic thought swirling about the German capital..." according to Stephen Farber and Marc Green, authors of *Holly-*



wood on the Couch (1993). Indeed, *The Road to Mandalay* — crafted into a final screenplay by Elliot Clawson and Waldemar Young — is invigorated by a Freudian ambiguity about the relationship between Singapore Joe (Chaney), a whoremaster with a startling dead eye, and his daughter (Lois Moran), raised in a convent with no knowledge that the disturbing man who visits her Mandalay curio shop is in reality her own father; instead, he becomes a vague but insistent threat of imminent sexual predation. The daughter falls in love with the Admiral, one of Joe's formerly disreputable, though now regenerate, partners (Owen Moore); Joe, outraged that the reprobate desires his daughter, who has been raised in a convent, refuses to acknowledge the man's reformation, and kidnaps him to Singapore preventing a marriage. The daughter follows, is trapped by another of Joe's enemies — an oriental who attempts to rape her — and finally stabs her own father to death in a climactic melee, never aware of his identity or his misguided efforts to protect her.

The film colony of the late twenties, like much of America, had begun to notice Freud, at least in the half-baked form his theories had taken "after being filtered through the successive minds of interpreters and popularizers and guileless readers and people who had heard guileless readers talk about it," according to 1920s historian Frederick Lewis Allen. "New words and phrases began to be banded about the cocktail-tray and the Mah Jong table — inferiority complex, sadism, masochism, Oedipus complex." Freud's message about the dangers of repression was interpreted, with atypically American pragmatism, as a simple green light for makin' whoopee on a grand scale. Samuel Goldwyn, with considerable hoopla, announced that he was traveling to Vienna to offer Dr. Freud, the expert on Eros, \$100,000 to concoct a tremendous "love story" for the screen. Freud, needless to say, declined to even meet with the producer.

As transmuted into an American fad, Freud's science verged on pseudoscience, holding the promise of a near-magical cure for all human discontents. Twenties-style psychobabble thus overlapped with the quintessentially Browning milieu of faith-healing and occult hucksterism: at least one Santa Monica boardwalk astrologer was observed displaying a shingle offering "Psychoanalysis, Readings." Freud was appalled at the transatlantic excesses perpetrated in his name. As he once wrote, only half-facetiously, "America is a mistake; a gigantic

mistake, it is true, but nonetheless a mistake."

But Browning, with an assist from Mankiewicz, was not mistaken in his understanding that overt manipulation of disturbing sexual symbolism was a sure way to rivet an audience's attention. *The Unholy Three* had turned on a naive Oedipal triangle — the hypermaternal image of a "grandmother," a hyper-masculine "strong man" and a hyperfrustrated "baby" — but *The Road to Mandalay* went much further, consciously teasing viewers with an unsettling parent-child melodrama, in which Singapore Joe's attempts to protect his daughter from the Admiral becomes an emotional rivalry with the Admiral. Accepting Freud's dictum that the unconscious mind equates the eyes in the plural with the testicles, and in the singular with the penis — a theory put forth in his influential 1919 essay "The Uncanny" — Chaney's dead eye further colors Joe's estrangement from his child as a kind in incestuous sexual deprivation. "A study of dreams, phantasies and myths has taught us that anxiety about one's eyes, the fear of going blind, is often enough a substitute for the dread of being castrated...the threat of being castrated in especial excites a particularly violent and obscure emotion... [that] gives the idea of losing other organs its intense colouring."

The Road to Mandalay was Mankiewicz's last association with Browning, although a Broadway play he co-authored with Marc Connelly the following season — *The Wild Man from Borneo* (1927) — paid a perhaps intentional homage to the turn-of-century world of carnival scams and traveling charlatans that had shaped Browning's career. Though based on a skit Connelly had originally written for W.C. Fields and Beatrice Lillie, the story contained so many Browning-like elements, including a dime-museum setting, a freak-show father who hides his identity from his daughter, and a theatrical landlady who once toured as "Lady Dracula" (Bram Stoker's novel had been recently adapted for the stage in England, and was of interest to both Chaney and Browning at this time), that Mankiewicz's interest in such a story so shortly after working with Browning seems more than an accident. *The Wild Man of Borneo* was a flop, however, and closed after fifteen performances. Fired by *The New Yorker*, Mankiewicz returned to Hollywood, becoming one of the most prolific script writers in the business, and ultimately one of the most lauded, winning an Academy Award for *Citizen Kane* in 1941.

The Road to Mandalay did good business, and posted a \$267,000 profit despite dismissive reviews. "The picture is quite tedious," wrote Mordaunt Hall in the *New York Times*, "and it strikes us that Mr. Browning did not quite know what to do with the players in a number of scenes. They show themselves and talk to one another, employing conventional actions that are helped out by the title writer." *Variety* called it "a slumming party abroad screened with a sugarcoating to make it respectable to America, which includes censors and reformers," but admitted that "the film has a large-sized dramatic punch, which, after all, was the thing aimed at and achieved, and which will sell the picture to exhibitors and to the public."

If Tod Browning's films favored themes of visceral, sex-charged resentment and revenge, they were nothing compared to the real-life psychosexual warfare that raged throughout the twenties between Louis B. Mayer and one of his leading contract stars. The darkly handsome actor John Gilbert had rocketed to major stardom in M-G-M vehicles like Victor Seastrom's *He Who Gets Slapped* with Lon Chaney (1924), Erich von Stroheim's *The Merry Widow* (1925) and King Vidor's *The Big Parade* (1925). But Gilbert clashed repeatedly with Mayer over offscreen issues of sex, mothers, and whores. In fact, they hated each other, so much that they actually came to blows. Their first major altercation had erupted over Gilbert's desire to film John Masefield's *The Widow in the Bye Street*; Mayer exploded when he learned the epic poem features the character of a prostitute: "You want me to make a film about a whore?" "Why not?" Gilbert said, adding, truthfully, "My own mother was a whore." Apoplectic, Mayer threatened to "cut off his balls" for making such a comment. Gilbert laughed and told the producer to go ahead — he'd still be the better

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man.

Another fracas ensued when Gilbert became infatuated with Greta Garbo, his co-star in the highly successful *The Flesh and the Devil* (1926). When Garbo didn't show up for their wedding, Mayer, one of the guests, compounded Gilbert's humiliation by gleefully slapping him on the back with the suggestion: "What do you have to marry her for? Why don't you just fuck her and forget about it?" Gilbert responded by pushing Mayer into a bathroom and slamming his head against the tiles. The men were pulled apart. In the presence of several guests, including the actress Eleanor Boardman, Mayer vowed to destroy Gilbert's career, even "if it costs me a million dollars."

The incendiary animosity between Gilbert and Mayer was reminiscent of any number of Tod Browning's smoldering revenge melodramas, and it was perversely appropriate that Mayer used a Browning film to punish his volatile contract star. Although the literal castration he had threatened was not a practical possibility, Mayer retaliated with a figurative emasculation—he cast Gilbert to star in Tod Browning's latest production as a despicable character named "Cock"—faced with the imminent threat of losing his head.

Cock o' the Walk was based, extremely loosely, on the Charles Tenney Jackson novel *The Day of Souls* which Goldwyn had expensively acquired in the early twenties and was determined to use, one way or another. The studio also quashed Gilbert's ambition to star in a film adaptation of Ferenc Molnár's romantic stage fantasy *Lilom* (1909); the script for *Cock o' the Walk* blatantly appropriated the Hungarian carnival setting of the play (which had nothing whatsoever to do with the Jackson novel, set in bohemian San Francisco), going so far as to costume Gilbert in the striped carnival barker's sweater worn by Joseph Schildkraut in the Theatre Guild's acclaimed 1921 revival of the Molnár play. *Cock o' the Walk* was released in the spring of 1927 under the decidedly more prosaic title *The Show*. Cock Robin (Gilbert) is the speller in a Hungarian freak emporium called the Palace of Illusions. Most of the attractions consist of women with lower-body anomalies or radical amputations: a mermaid, scaly from the waist down; a truncated half-girl, and a disembodied head trapped in a giant spider web. The sideshow's *piece de resistance*, however, is a grisly playlet depicting Salome's dance of the seven veils and the decapitation of John the Baptist (played by Gilbert). After Herod, played by an actor known as The Greek (Lionel Barrymore) performs the clever illusion, involving trap doors, the substitution of a fake sword, etc., Salome (Renee Adoree, one of Gilbert's real-life romantic attachments) receives the head on a silver charger. It opens its eyes and declares, "Salome, thou art a wicked woman!" before she silences it with a languorous kiss.

The freak-show exposition contains some remarkable double entendres of the kind that enraged moral reformers of the Prohibition era: as Cock displays Zela, the bottomless woman, he winkingly reassures the crowd: "Believe me, boys—there's no cold feet here to bother you." He plunges even further with the phony mermaid: "Now I know why the divers go down!" a gawker guffaws. (By the time Salome osculates the bodiless Baptist, one fully expects Browning to propose a new meaning for the phrase "giving head," but somehow he passes on the opportunity.) Cock, we learn, is a sexual opportunist who has no difficulty in extracting money from the young girls who are smitten with him. One, the daughter of shepherd whom the sinister Greek had killed for a roll of money that was actually in the girl's possession, gives the cash to Cock for supposed safekeeping. To complicate matters further, Salome, whom the Greek has been keeping as a mistress, is really in love with Cock begs him to return the shepherd's money. The Greek becomes jealous and decides to exact his sexual revenge by actually chopping off Cock's head—on stage. He is not successful, and Cock escapes with Salome into a clumsily-appended subplot (the only part of the film taken from Tenney's novel) in which the barker redeems himself by posing as the long-lost son of Salome's blind, delusional, dying father whose real son is being hung in the square outside. The old man dies, believing he has been reunited with his child. His good deed done, Cock is now ready to be

a true moral foil for the Greek, who tries to kill him with a giant, poisonous reptile he has borrowed from the sideshow. In the final, wildly melodramatic fracas, the Greek is trapped in a closet with the deadly animal and fatally bitten. Cock and Salome are reunited on the sideshow platform, life's strange carnival marching on.

By pushing grotesque imagery and improbably plot twists to extreme limits, *The Show* achieves a dreamlike plateau previously unattained in the American cinema: it is arguably the closest approximation of *Caligari's* expressionism that Hollywood had yet attempted, even if the effects were highly diluted. The truly fantastic and surreal was still verboten in the American cinema, but Browning was nonetheless able to "sell" his fascination with grotesque visuals by simultaneously debunking them as cynical sideshow illusions. In its emphasis on images and evocations of below-the-waist mutilation, *The Show* again echoes Freud's essay "The Uncanny." One image that opens the film, a disembodied female hand that collects tickets from patrons as they enter the tent, seems almost a verbatim borrowing from Freud's observation that "Disembodied limbs, a severed head, a hand cut off at the wrist...all these have something peculiarly uncanny about them, especially when...they prove capable of independent activity in addition. As we already know, this kind of uncanniness springs from its proximity to the castration complex."

Browning's perennial fascination with sexually-charged mutilation imagery led to a completely unsubstantiated, but nonetheless long-standing Hollywood rumor that he had himself suffered a disfiguring genital trauma in the car crash that killed Elmer Booth. The story was—to say the least—psychologically naive; the exhibition of castration anxiety, to Freud, was evidence of a universal unease, not a telltale symptom of individual anomaly. The wide popularity of Ernest Hemingway's *The Sun Also Rises* (1926) with its story of wartime emasculation, is evidence for the general public's built-in receptivity to such themes.

The Show received mixed reviews—many critics complained about John Gilbert being cast in a largely unsympathetic role. This one starts off like a house afire but turns out to be much smoke and little flame," the *New York Morning Telegraph* complained, citing "inserts of the most puerile, milk-and-water sequences"—the Tenney material—"ever alleged to be pathos." The *New York Daily Mirror* disagreed, calling *The Show* "snappy and unusual" and thanked heaven that the film's characters lacked the "syrupy virtue" so common in Hollywood pictures of the time. "Any one who is tired of drawing room dramas that are intensely unreal despite the fact that nothing particularly remarkable happens in them will have a wonderful time at *The Show*," opined the *New York Evening Post*, "for here all sorts of remarkable things happen in the most convincing manner possible." The *New York Times* managed, stinging—by inadvertence—to illuminate an aspect of Browning's films harking back to his vaudeville-era marriage to Amy Stevens: "Like most of Mr. Browning's heroes, Cock Robin escapes the penalty of the law for taking money from a nice little girl."

Richard Watts, Jr., film critic for the *New York Herald Tribune*, gave *The Show* a positive evaluation. "It has been one of the less desirable results of current cinema development that the individuality of directors is suppressed before the standardization of picture making... Only Tod Browning stands for the moment aloof from the blandishment of imitators and the bludgeons of those who would change his intent." According to Watts, "Browning is the combination Edgar Allan Poe and Sax Rohmer of the cinema. Where every director, save Stroheim, breathes wholesomeness, out-of-door freshness and the healthiness of the clean-limbed, Tod Browning revels in murkiness...his cinematic mind is a creeping torture chamber, a place of darkness, deviousness and death." The critic noted, with pleasure, that "there is no reason to think that Mr. Browning is in immediate danger of becoming a director of clean-limbed photoplays. His next production bears the gratifying title of *Alonzo the Armless*, and is not too difficult to imagine the sort of merry tale it is likely to be."

In Browning's next project, Freudian theory

would be bizarrely literalized into a weird and spectacular circus attraction. Based on an original story by Browning, *Alonzo the Armless* was a vehicle for Lon Chaney that would prove to be one of the darkest carnivals of the entire Browning canon. Its title changed—rather vaguely—to *The Unknown*, the film's release in New York coincided with Lindbergh's triumphant homecoming, but it could not have provided a more antithetical cultural counterpoint to the celebratory mood of June 1927. Nevertheless, *The Unknown* managed to find a huge audience.

"There is a story they tell in old Madrid...the story, they say, is true..." reads the opening title, urging us to suspend our disbelief as we enter a world of heightened unreality. The setting is a Spanish circus, featuring an armless entertainer named Alonzo (Chaney), a precision knifethrower and sharpshooter who handles blades and bullets with his bare feet. In the opening scene, Alonzo demonstrates the prowess of his aim: seated at one end of a rotating platform, he propels a phallic barrage of knives and ammunition unerringly at his beautiful assistant, Nanon (Joan Crawford). Articles of her clothing fall away, their stays severed by Alonzo's wildly sublimated ardor.

Alonzo actually has arms, a fact known only by his dwarf assistant, Cojo (John George), who daily laces him into a cruel leather corset to maintain the illusion of amputation. Cojo's name, in proper Spanish, means "lame;" in the vernacular, it also conjures cojones, or testicles. Alonzo has two reasons for his disguise—first, it hides his link to previous, unidentified crimes; second, it keeps him in favor with Nanon, who is possessed by a bizarre phobia: a repulsion to men's upper extremities. ("Men! The beasts! God would show wisdom if he took the hands from all of them!") Alonzo may have arms, but he's still a freak, possessed of a double thumb on one hand. In the original story, Browning and scenarist Waldemar Young intended a more hideous physical deformity along the lines of a claw. The double thumb seems yet more evidence of the possible influence of Freud's essay "The Uncanny;" doubling is viewed by Freud as an imaginative defense against the feared loss of the self, or a part of the self.

Although Alonzo restricts his pining for Nanon to a platonic plane, he draws the wrath of her father, owner of the circus. One dark night, arms unlaced, he strangles the man outside of his wagon. Nanon, peering from a window, does not see the killer's face, but she does glimpse the unforgettable double thumb as it crushes her father's windpipe.

While Alonzo broods over the problem of how best to win Nanon without letting her learn his secrets, the girl is pursued, far more conventionally, by a strong man named Malabar (Norman Kerry). Alonzo, crazed with jealousy, blackmails a surgeon into actually removing his arms. But then he returns to the circus after his recuperation, he finds that Nanon has shaken off her phobia and is now happily engaged to Malabar. The truth dawns on Alonzo in a long, cruelly teasing sequence in which he mistakes the couple's talk of marriage with his own nuptial fantasies. The film reaches a climax when Alonzo attempts to sabotage Malabar and Nanon's crazy specialty act: a pair of white stallions on treadmills are whipped into a frenzy by a scantily-clad Nanon, while Malabar restrains them. Knowing that a failure of the treadmills could cause the horses to rip Malabar's arms from their sockets, Alonzo proceeds to make the necessarily mechanical adjustments. Just before Malabar is torn apart, Alonzo falls onto the treadmill and is delivered to his death beneath the horse's punishing hooves.

The story is preposterous, yet it obeys its own obsessive dream-logic so rigorously that it can keep even today's sophisticated audiences spellbound and appalled. Unlike many of Browning's films, *The Unknown* is single-minded in its brutal momentum, unencumbered by distracting subplots and unconvincing last-minute repentances. Like the stage contraption that kills Chaney at the film's conclusion, *The Unknown* itself is a perfectly constructed torture machine, and arguably Browning's most accomplished film.

The sadomasochistic tone pervading the Browning/Chaney collaborations raises legitimate questions about the private psychologies that together

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TWENTY-FOUR-SHEET



SIX-SHEET



THREE-SHEET



THREE-SHEET



generated such cruel public spectacles. Chaney, according to screenwriter-director Curt Siodmak, who worked with the actor's son in numerous films for Universal in the forties, the actor "seemed to have been a sadistic character, the way he treated Lon [Jr.] as a child and young man." In Siodmak's account, the younger Chaney survived his father's maltreatment "a tortured person." Siodmak hinted that he knew more about the relationship, but found public airing of such matters distasteful. It should be noted, however, that however he behaved in his private life, Lon Chaney's co-workers (unlike Browning's) typically praised him for his numerous considerations and kindnesses on the set.

Joan Crawford, who was eighteen at the time of *The Unknown*, had few memories of Browning, but vividly recalled Chaney's self-punishment behavior. "I was so eager to learn my craft in those days...that I did more observing of acting than I did of directors and directing techniques." Nonetheless, she could remember "how very soft-spoken, quiet and sensitive Tod Browning was, and how very knowledgeable." She recalled Chaney's ordeal with his leather harness as "agonizing...when he was not before the camera, Mr. Browning would say to him, 'Lon, don't you want me to untie your arms?' And Lon would answer, 'No, the pain I am enduring now will help the scene. Let's go!'" Crawford remembered Chaney keeping his arms bound one day for five hours, "enduring such numbness, such torture, that when we got to this scene, he was able to convey not just realism but such emotional agony that it was shocking...and fascinating." The actress found Chaney to be "the most tense, exciting individual I'd ever met, a man mesmerized into his part." When he acted, "it was as if God were working, he had such profound concentration. It was then I became aware for the first time the difference between standing in front of a camera, and acting." In Crawford's recollection, Browning was "concerned that all of us were comfortable in our scenes...he was very patient with me, a newcomer." Chaney also offered Crawford a combination of technical and emotional assistance:

I'll never forget one incident with Lon when we were filming The Unknown. I was having trouble crying, which is one of the hardest jobs we have anyhow. I felt more like laughing, and Lon saw it. He came over and put his hand on my shoulder and said, "Everything's just all right." The words didn't mean anything, but the sympathy in his voice and the understanding in his action was enough. I started to cry, and cried all through the scene. I love working with Lon, and speaking of crying, we have stood around and cried at him when he is doing a sad scene, and you don't forget it.

It is clear that Lon Chaney projected the image of physical suffering as both the definition and price of his stardom; exactly why he chose to do so is not clear, and since he left no revealing journals or correspondence on the matter, may forever remain obscure. On one level he offered his large working-class audience a grotesque exaggeration of the puritan work ethic: he toiled hard, he suffered, he succeeded – and so, by extension, might they. In the populist cathedral of the American cinema, Chaney was a martyr saint, his celebrity maintained as a kind of crucifixion-in-progress. "When we're getting ready to discuss a new story," Browning told an interviewer, Chaney would "amble into my office and say, 'Well, what's it going to be, boss?' I'll say, 'This time a leg comes off, or an arm, or a nose' – whatever it may be."

There were limits, of course, to Chaney's somatic flexibility – he was in no sense a trained contortionist. In *The Unknown* he was forced, for the first time, to employ a double. The upper half of his body hidden from camera view, a real armless man named Dismuki provided the dexterous footwork for scenes in which Chaney smoked, mopped his brow, etc. But however accomplished the illusions, the overall sickliness of the Browning/Chaney formulas and their resemblance to a public flogging was making a growing number of critics truly queasy.

Richard Watts, Jr., writing in the *New York Herald Tribune*, observed that "The case of Mr. Tod Browning is rapidly approaching the pathological. After a series of minor horrors that featured such

comparatively respectable creations as murderous midgets, crippled thieves and poisonous reptiles, all sinister and deadly in a murky atmosphere of blackness and unholy doom, the director presents us now with a melodrama that might have been made from a scenario dashed off by the Messrs. Leopold and Loeb in a quiet moment." Watts conceded that, given a cinema otherwise so completely devoted to red-blooded values and "general aggressive cleanliness" that films of the sort Browning championed might provide "a valuable counteracting influence." Nonetheless, he felt a trifle repelled by *The Unknown*. "What amazes me," he wrote, "is that those careful custodians of public squeamishness, Mr. Hays and Mr. Thalberg, allowed the director to go on...compared to Tod Browning, the morose Erich von Stroheim is the original apostle of sweetness and light." Watts was referring to Will H. Hays, the former U.S. Postmaster General who had been named head of the Motion Picture Producers and Distributors of America (MPPDA), an industry self-regulatory organization founded in wake of such scandals as the Roscoe "Fatty" Arbuckle sex-murder trial. At the time, however, the MPPDA existed at the pleasure of the studios and didn't have any real regulatory power, functioning largely as an industry public relations buffer.

Reflecting the growing public alarm over the moral tone of motion picture entertainment in the late twenties, *The Unknown* was the first Browning/Chaney film to be frankly and aggressively attacked in the press for its melodramatic morbidity. The *New York Sun* assured readers that "The suspicion that the picture might have been written by Nero, directed by Lucretia Borgia, constructed by the shade of Edgar Allan Poe and lighted by a well-known vivisectionist was absolutely groundless... *The Unknown* is merely one of the cute little bits of lace designed and executed by Tod Browning..." The *Sun* admitted that *The Unknown* "may be just what the public wants. If it is – well, the good old days of the Roman Empire are upon us." The *New York Daily Mirror* suggested that "If you like to tear butterflies apart and see sausage made you may like the climax to *The Unknown*...typical Chaney fare spiced with cannibalism and flavored with the Spanish inquisition." The *New York Evening Post* observed that "Mr. Chaney has been twisting joints and lacing himself into strait-jackets for a long time – so long, in fact, that there is almost nothing left for him now but the Headless Horseman. No doubt that will come later." The *Evening Post* called *The Unknown* a remarkably unpleasant picture, which can hardly be recommended as even moderate entertainment. A visit to the dissecting room in a hospital would be quite as pleasant, and at the same time more instructive." The conservative *Harrison's Reports* was particularly disturbed:

One can imagine a moral pervert of the present day, or professional torturers of the times of the Spanish Inquisition that gloated over the miseries of their victims on the rack and over their roasting on hot iron bars enjoying screen details of the kind set forth in The Unknown, but it is difficult to fancy average men and women of a modern audience in this enlightened age being entertained by such a thoroughly fiendish mingling of bloodlust, cruelty and horrors...Of Mr. Chaney's acting it is enough to say it is excellent, of its kind. Similar praise might well be given the work of a skilled surgeon in ripping open the abdomen of a patient, but who wants to see him do it?

"Despite the popularity of the Chaney distortions," the *New York Telegram* wrote, "it is rumored that this will be the actor's last film of this sort for some time. The 'don't step on it' [it might be Lon Chaney] jokes, combined with a poisonous Broadway rumor that Chaney's next film would be entitled *Teddy the Torso*, have apparently pierced deeply into Hollywood hearts."

In Europe, however, Browning was taken far more seriously by cineastes still under the spell of a fantastic expressionism that had still only partially penetrated America. Browning "is an unbridled romantic," wrote the French critic Jacques B. Brunius in 1929, "and even when making box-office pictures for the average cinemagoer he does not conceal the fact that he is influenced by German romantic-ex-

pressionism – even when he uses, as in this case, a psychological situation as a springboard, he feels no compulsion to stay on this plane." Brunius admitted that *The Unknown* contained "more than the usual ration of extravagance...fit[ting] with Tod Browning's relish for freaks, monsters, and extravagant situations – enough for aesthetically minded people to be squeamish and patronizing about it. What does it matter for those who, like myself, discover in Tod Browning's films an undefinable poetry, an uncanny charm, probably irrelevant to the canons of Great Art, I confess, but nonetheless effective and disturbing."

The Unknown was thought to be a lost film for many years, until a print was discovered, misplaced, in a French archive. Amusingly, its translated title, *L'Inconnu*, had robotically relegated it the section of canisters marked "Inconnu," containing unidentified reels of film.

Browning's next story, filmed as *The Hypnotist*, and released as *London After Midnight*, was most likely an attempt to capitalize on the 1927 London stage success of Bram Stoker's *Dracula*, dramatized by Hamilton Deane and revised for Broadway by John L. Balderston, London correspondent for the *New York Sun* and joint playwright, with J.C. Squires, of the supernatural fantasy *Berkeley Square* (1928). Stoker's widow was jealously guarding motion picture rights to *Dracula* – she had been burned by the German plagiarist called *Nosferatu* (1922) – but at the moment the American studios weren't interested in a frankly occult tale. In the Hollywood scheme of things, supernatural spectacles were acceptable only if they could be explained away as the machinations of mere mortals, usually part of a criminal conspiracy. Browning, of course, was perfectly at home with such an approach, which he had previously exploited in *The Mystic* and other films. But he also wanted very much to do a straight adaptation of *Dracula*, with Chaney in the title role. The *New York Times* reported, nine years after the fact, that "Chaney wanted to act *Dracula* and often discussed the part with Tod Browning...Both men believed the American public to be 90 per cent superstitious and ripe for horror films. Chaney had a full scenario and a secret makeup worked out even at that early date..." With its spectacular bat, wolf, and mist transformations, all accomplished by a 500-year old title character who grows younger as he drinks human blood, *Dracula* would indeed offer Chaney his ultimate challenge in cinematic metamorphosis. But Metro, as in the matter of *Liliom*, decided it better to imitate *Dracula* than to purchase it.

Browning's story borrowed brazenly from the stage version of *Dracula*, escaping charges of plagiarism by debunking its second-hand vampire trappings as part of a criminal investigation. It featured an English heroine named Lucy (Marceline Day), who lives next door to a spooky, ruined estate housing a vampiric spectre in white tie and black cloak, known as the Man in the Beaver Hat (Chaney) along with his thoroughly original bat-girl assistant, Lurette, played by Edna Tichenor. Both stories recounted ancient vampire lore, the protective aspects of garlic, etc.; featured an authoritative middle-aged investigator (Van Helsing in *Dracula*; Chaney in a second role as Inspector Burke of Scotland Yard) who employs hypnotism; eerie entrances via clouds of mist, an ineffectual juvenile lead (Jonathan Harker in *Dracula*; actor Conrad Nagel in *London After Midnight*); and highly theatrical bat transformations.

Chaney's beavered bogey was patterned, rather obviously, after the figure of Werner Krauss as the cloaked, behatted, shock-haired carnival mountebank in *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari*; whether or not Browning had input into this aspect of the character's appearance can't be authoritatively documented, but the costuming and makeup nonetheless provide an important iconographic link between the predatory con-men who populated the films of Browning's early career and the preternatural vampires who inhabited his later work. In Browning's story, as scripted by Waldemar Young, the vampires are merely stooges employed by the Scotland Yard inspector to trap a murderer, but they allowed Browning to push his dark reveries considerably beyond the confines of commonplace crook melodramas into cobweb-festooned realms of the



The Black Bird is another crook-scam story, this time set in the seedy Limehouse district of London and featuring Chaney as a master criminals called the Black Bird. He covers his crimes by assuming the identity of a "twin brother" known as the Bishop, the kindly, cruelly palsied head of a mission who uses the charity operation and his faked disability as elaborate fronts for the Black Bird's crimes. The Black Bird and another crook, West End Bertie (Owen Moore) vie for the affections of a music hall performer, Fifi (Renee Adoree); the ensuing melodrama takes an O. Henry turn when the Black Bird is actually paralyzed in a police raid, and dies having truly become his false persona.

ultimate social outsiders: the living dead. Chaney's makeup caused him only minimal discomfort; in addition to ghastly white-face and shark-like dentures (outfitted with protruding hooks that lifted the sides of his mouth into a death-rictus), the actor employed loops of wire fitted into the skin around his eyes like monocles, and expanded to pull open the lids: the film reportedly featured close-ups of the bloodshot, watery orbs, their irises rolling like loose egg yolks. Forrest J Ackerman, one of the country's leading collectors of fantastic film memorabilia, saw the film as a boy in San Francisco during its initial release, and likened Chaney's bizarre, scuttling posture to a macabre variation of Groucho Marx. The late horror writer Robert Bloch, who also saw the film as a child, recalled one of Browning's oddest bits of atmosphere: a pride of scurrying armadillos, hardly indigenous to London, but glimpsed nonetheless through the cobwebs of the vampire's mansion.

London After Midnight was released in December 1927, two months after *Dracula* had proved a Broadway hit. Today, it remains one of the "lost" Browning/Chaney films and is considered by the American Film Institute – not to mention hoards of film historians and fans – to be one of the most important missing-in-action pictures of the silent era. Periodic reports of its rediscovery still have the power to set phone lines buzzing from coast to coast as film buffs spread and embellish the rumors. Part of the phantom film's enduring mystique is undoubtedly attributable to its being the first American "vampire" film – vampirism, by the Anne Rice-saturated 1990s, having become one of our most prevalent, if overrated, cultural themes – but also due to the fact that *London After Midnight* proved the most profitable of all Browning/Chaney collaborations for M-G-M, grossing more than a million dollars in worldwide rentals, with a profit of \$540,000.

The *New York Herald Tribune* noted that "The distinguished talents of Lon Chaney, Tod Browning, and the late author of *Dracula* are shrewdly combined in the picture...the scenes are so imaginatively done and Mr. Chaney's passion for grotesque makeup is so effective, that you feel that shortly both director and star will be hard at work making the real *Dracula* – a 'movie' property if there

ever was one." *Harrison's Reports* called Chaney's makeup "hideous – enough to make one sick in the stomach."

But in England the courts had to consider whether Chaney's makeup was enough to incite murder.

On October 23, 1928, a 29 year-old Welsh carpenter named Robert Williams and a 22 year-old Irish housemaid named Julia Mangan were found in London's Hyde Park, their throats slashed by a razor. Mangan died before reaching St. George's Hospital, but Williams survived. He was subsequently charged with murder and attempted suicide; a first trial ended in a hung jury over the question of his sanity. During Williams' second trial, the defense asserted that just before the killing, the prisoner was possessed by a vision of Lon Chaney. According to the *London Times*, "The prisoner, in the witness box, said that, while he was talking to the girl in the park noises came into his head, and it seemed as if steam was coming out of the sides of his head, and as if a red-hot iron were being pushed in behind his eyes. He thought he saw Lon Chaney, a film actor, in a corner, shouting and making faces at him. He did not remember taking a razor from his pocket, or using the razor on the girl or on himself. The next thing he remembered was a nurse washing his feet at the hospital." A doctor called as a defense witness gave the opinion that Williams suffered from a form of epileptic insanity. Justice Travers Humphreys, while admitting that Chaney's makeup in *London After Midnight* presented a "horrifying and terrible spectacle," and that members of the jury who had seen the film, or even advertisements for *London After Midnight*, might themselves be horrified, pointed out that simply being frightened by a characterization meant to be frightening, and recalling it in a moment of emotional excitement, hardly indicated insanity, or epilepsy. The jury agreed, and Williams was sentenced to death on January 10, 1929. But three weeks later, on the advice of the Home Secretary, the condemned man was issued a reprieve on medical grounds.

Browning and Chaney's next project – their second "lost" film – was a calculated attempt to break the mold of grotesque masquerade; the publicity for *The Big City*, released in early 1928, emphasized

that Chaney would appear wearing his own face – one of the few real novelties left to the actor, and his audience. The story was another crook caper, with Chaney as a dapper criminal don named Chuck Collins involved in double-crossing intrigue and schmaltzy reformation against a colorful nightclub setting (Browning attempted to engage Sophie Tucker for some atmosphere, but was put off by her \$5,000 demand for thoroughly silent song-styling). Chaney acted opposite two proven co-stars, Marceline Day from *London After Midnight* and Betty Compson, who last acted with Chaney in his first hit, *The Miracle Man*. Betty Compson recalled her role as "trite and uninteresting," an assignment with Browning "completed so quickly, that it was impossible for me to know him even slightly." Compson played a hard-boiled moll (the antithesis of Day's wide-eyed ingenue) who helps Chaney execute a convoluted jewel robbery involving a specialty act of "headless" dancers (who might have waltzed in from the set of *The Show*) and the concealment of the loot in a plate of spaghetti right under the nose of the law. (Hard-core Freudians, fishing for revealing resonance, might well consider into the larger connotations of "family jewels," endlessly dangled and jeopardized in one Browning film after another).

The film did well, posting a profit of \$387,000. But reviews of *The Big City* reflected the increasing polarization of critics on the subject of Tod Browning. The *Chicago Sunday Tribune* called him "a wiz of a director, and exceedingly wizzy in this number." But *The Film Spectator* felt that Browning had "directed wretchedly." "Every situation in *The Big City* is a manufactured one...One absurd scene follows another until the only feature of the picture that is entertaining is the speculation it arouses as to how long the absurdities can last." Richard Watts, Jr., a critic who followed Browning's Hollywood progress with particular acumen, sensed that the essence of the Browning/Chaney mystique was beginning to wobble, and commented in the *New York Herald Tribune*:

The Clean Love of a Good Woman is hard at work reforming Mr. Lon Chaney this week, but the result, somewhat to the discredit of virtue, is rather a di-

(continued)



Tod Browning and John Gilbert from *The Show*.

sastrous one. The demands of cinema censorship being what they are, it is only natural that crime pictures should be softened into anemia by the necessary last-reel reformation of the hero-crook, but it hardly seems necessary to sentimentalize this surrender in the ecstatic way resorted to in the film...This orgy of reform is all the more surprising because the picture was both written and directed by Tod Browning, ordinarily the most uncompromising of the screen's devil worshippers...the sight of the First Diabolist of the Cinema concerned in the reformation and marriage of all his characters at the same time is a disconcerting one.

Following the completion of *The Big City*, Tod and Alice Browning took a six-week vacation in Europe, at least part of which was devoted to seeking out story material. Despite earlier publicity stories implying he had toured the world as a circus performer in his youth, the only documentation of a passport in Browning's name is one issued in late 1927, and the trip was, in all likelihood, Browning's first trip abroad.

He could afford such luxuries now; by 1927 the Brownings owned an impressive Tudor-style mansion on a triangle of land opposite the Beverly Hills Hotel, and were building a second beachfront residence at Malibu. Additionally, Browning had invested in a vineyard near Emeryville, California. By today's standards and tax rates, his salary of \$100,000 a year plus bonuses made him the equivalent of a millionaire. All in all, he had come a long way from the cramped house in working-class Louisville, from carnival tents and from boarding houses.

The degree to which he kept in touch with his family can't be determined, but Helen Polsgrove, his foster-sister's daughter, recalled that Lydia Browning was always proud of her son, and visited their house to read his letters whenever they arrived. Still, he never returned home, and the whirlwind visit after the success of *The Unholy Three* would prove to be the last time he saw his mother, alive or dead. One day in 1927, Lydia "was hanging

clothes out in the backyard, and fell and broke her hip and went to Highland Baptist Hospital where she stayed for one year. She came home with a nurse in uniform, and got pneumonia and died." Despite their recollections, the official cause of Lydia Browning's death was a cerebral hemorrhage on May 24, 1928. Jennie Block's daughters remembered how Avery Browning let them know of his mother's passing - not in person, or by a phone call, but by the solemn formality of three signaling knocks on their front door.

Although Browning had no production immediately in progress - his next film would not begin shooting for a month after his mother's death - he did not make the trip to Louisville for his mother's funeral, or at any time thereafter to be with his family in their grief. Funeral arrangements were made by Jennie, who selected a plain silver-gray casket and matching burial clothes. Only a dozen folding chairs were required for the wake. Five limousines, including the hearse, were needed for the funeral, held May 28 at the Baptist church at the corner of 22nd and Walnut Streets. Interment was at Eastern Cemetery, under a temporary burial plate marked "Mama."

Avery Browning paid the bill: \$423.00, roughly one-percent of his brother's per-picture salary under a new contract with M-G-M which once more doubled his salary. His production-in-preparation, an adaptation of the lurid Broadway play *Kongo* by Charles de Vonde and Kilbourn Gordon, was, perhaps coincidentally, the most extreme depiction of parent-child alienation Browning had yet attempted. Retitled *West of Zanzibar*, the film was Browning's first project under an arrangement with Metro which increased his salary to \$45,000 a picture, with an contingent bonus of \$5,000. *Kongo* told the sordid story of a stage magician, who, grappling with a rival for his wife's affections, is paralyzed in the altercation. The magician's wife disappears, and he assumes she has run away with his rival, an ivory trader. A few years later, she returns, with a daughter, but dies before she is able to talk to him. He takes the child and vows his vengeance, following

the hated rival to Africa. He sets himself up as a wheelchair-ridden god to the natives, who do his bidding. For his revenge, he consigns the child to a whorehouse in Zanzibar, where she contracts syphilis. He summons his wife's lover, contriving to have him shot by the natives after their meeting, knowing that it is their custom to burn alive the wife or daughter of men who have died. But the rival presents his own surprise - the girl is not his, but the magician's, who has in his blind thirst for vengeance mistakenly consigned his own child to a hideously fatal sexual disease. The natives kill the rival, and demand the live cremation of the girl. The magician, using some of his old stage tricks, helps the girl escape with a derelict doctor who can offer her medical assistance, and is himself sacrificed on the natives' pyre.

The stage play, presented in New York with Walter Huston as the crippled avenger, was initially deemed too hideous for any type of Hollywood adaptation, but Browning managed to soften the script considerably - primarily by substituting alcoholism for syphilis - and ultimately circumvented the Hays Office's objections. As the magician Phroso, a.k.a. "Dead Legs" Flint, Chaney was able to essay a crippled role without reliance on painful harnesses or extreme makeup, but merely the ability to project hate while letting his lower limbs go rubbery. Lionel Barrymore played Chaney's nemesis, and Mary Nolan was given the role of the degraded daughter (who, in classic Browning fashion, never recognizes her natural parent).

But for many critics, *West of Zanzibar* was the final straw in the Browning/Chaney freak circus. *Harrison's Reports* not only panned the film, but ran a lead editorial entitled "An outpouring of the Cesspools of Hollywood!" expanding on its outrage. "How any normal person could have thought that this horrible syphilitic play [*Kongo*] could have made an entertaining picture, even with Lon Chaney...is beyond comprehension. But here it is, a Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer picture, which you will be compelled to show to the people of the United States as entertainment." *Harrison's Reports* urged individual theatre owners to marshal the moral support of civic and religious groups to resist films like *West of Zanzibar*. "The stupidity of some of the producers seems to be unbounded...In no other industry do the manufacturers insist on producing an article that the consumers do not want. Only in the moving picture industry this thing happens."

In reality, motion picture consumers - at least those who actually bought tickets, resulting in worldwide billings of \$921,000 for *West of Zanzibar* - were sending a different message entirely. But many critics had begun to resist Browning and Chaney's increasingly formulaic concoctions on artistic grounds. "It's getting so that Lon Chaney's name warns theatergoers of a bad picture, and with Tod Browning atrocity is assured...it would be a good idea if Browning let someone else play his malignant cripple for a change," Donald Beaton wrote in *The Film Spectator*. "There are a lot of people who are getting sick of seeing Chaney gulp over some girl half his age who is ungrateful enough to love someone else or set his jaw while another girl who doesn't know she is his daughter tells him that he is a low form of life...Chaney's once considerable acting ability has been atrophied by the parts he has to play until he has about three expressions left..."

Irving Thalberg may well have begun to have doubts about the long-term viability of the Chaney/Browning pairings, despite their profitability. The looming spectre of talking pictures posed a challenge and a threat to everyone who had achieved success in the silent period; although a non-talkie, *West of Zanzibar* had included a synchronized orchestral score with sound effects as a sop to audiences already exposed to and excited by *The Jazz Singer* (1927) and the noisy cinematic future it foretold.

Neither Browning or Chaney was comfortable with the prospect of a talking screen; their art, after all was firmly grounded in the tradition of pantomime melodrama, with little grounding in the nuances of vocal projection beyond their early work in vaudeville. To the public, however, Chaney's virtuosity in previous screen portrayals implied that he might be just as protean in the talkative hereaf-

ter. But Chaney's contract made no mention of any vocal requirements – and the actor held fast to the letter of his obligation.

By 1928, the question of the continued viability of Chaney and Browning as a team must have occurred to Thalberg: Chaney's biggest hit of all had been *Tell It to the Marines* (1927), a straight dramatic picture directed by George Hill, devoid of disability and mutilation, that had nevertheless shown a profit of \$664,000, dwarfing even the estimable earnings of *London After Midnight*. Mr. Wu (1927), directed by William Nigh, showed an above-the-line figure of \$439,000. *While the City Sleeps* (1928) with Jack Conway directing Chaney in a sympathetic, girl-getting role, ended up \$399,000 in the black. *Laugh, Clown, Laugh* (1928), inspired by *I Pagliacci*, with Chaney opposite a fourteen-year-old Loretta Young, showed a profit of \$450,000.

In other words, Browning's partnership with Chaney was hardly sacrosanct from Metro's standpoint: the actor frankly earned better for the studio without the director – non-Browning films with Chaney between 1924 and 1928 showed an average profit \$30,000 higher than films with Browning at the helm. And the lack of documentary evidence for the standing legend of a dedicated creative relationship between the men is, to say the least, striking. Chaney's only published comments on Browning were politely dismissive: he told a writer for *Photoplay* that while he respected Browning, and understood that many people had come to think of him as "the Chaney director," the selection of directors was almost a matter of indifference to him. Following Chaney's death, the writer Adela Rogers St. John asked Browning about their working relationship. "Never said anything to me on the set except, 'Yes, boss,'" he replied. "We used to argue a bit before and after hours. But on the set he was a good soldier." But St. John seemed to have information of her own. "Argue!" she wrote. "They fought like a couple of sea lions. They yelled and cursed each other out plenty. But just let anyone else interfere. Let any executive or writer attempt to take advantage of the apparent friction. They soon found out it was a very private fight. Tod and Lon instantly ganged up on the intruder, who decided that he would be better occupied elsewhere." Other observers formed their own impressions. To agent Phil Berg, "Tod and Chaney were simpatico," though both men could be enigmatic. (Berg hosted a noon-time "director's table" for his clients and their stars, but "Chaney would very rarely come to lunch with us – and when he did, he wouldn't say anything!") Film editor Errol Taggart, who cut *The Black Bird*, *The Road to Mandalay*, and co-edited *London After Midnight*, once commented that the director and actor "weren't exactly bosom buddies."

Whatever the nature of the men's relationship, their public collaboration was limping toward its final hour.

Browning and Chaney's last picture, *Where East Is East* (1929), proved an anemic reread of characters and plot devices from earlier films. One again senses their mutual hesitation at taking on talkies, resorting to another synchronized music track with sound effects to appease the box-office, and looking profoundly backward in the attempt to create a story. In a story by Browning scripted by Waldemar Young, Chaney played "Tiger" Haynes, and animal trapper in Indo-China who wears his resume on his deeply scarred face (an effect achieved with non-flexible collodion, a substance still used by makeup artists, which pulls and puckers the skin as it dries). Tiger has a charmed, if perhaps overly playful, relationship with his effervescent daughter Toyo (Lupe Velez) interrupted by the appearance of a suitor, Bobby (Lloyd Hughes) and the reappearance of Toyo's dragon-lady mother, the sloe-eyed Madame de Silva (Estelle Taylor, real-life wife of former heavyweight boxing champion Jack Dempsey). In a psychosexual configuration even Freud would have been hard-pressed to unravel, the mother decides to torture the father by seducing the daughter's fiancé – and raising the wrath of the animal kingdom in the process. For in the intervening years, we learn, Tiger has kept a resentful, abused gorilla in his menagerie, who remembers mama's transgressions from way back when. At the climactic moment, he releases the ape to pay a midnight visit to Madame de Silva's boudoir. She opens the door

eagerly, expecting Bobby's embrace – but instead meets a crowd-pleasing death in the best tradition of Poe's *Murders in the Rue Morgue*.

Reviewers had wildly divergent responses to *Where East Is East*. *The Film Spectator* ran two notices, the first calling it "the best job that Tod Browning has ever done," a "successions of beautiful exotic, and romantic scenes." Chaney was commended for making "no attempt to disguise himself as either a beetle or a battleship." But the reviewer protested Browning's "giving us many close-ups of kisses, a beastly exhibition of poor taste entirely out of keeping with the artistic standard of the production as a whole." A few weeks later, the publication saw fit to run a second, thoroughly stinging review, noting that "Lupe Velez plays one of those bounding half-caste girls whose very appearance on the screen makes the hand itch for a fly swatter...Screen writers, for some reason, have the idea if the girl has the blood of two races in her veins, she must go nutty and leap around as if she were weaned on a pogo stick." *The New York Times* praised "several shrewdly photographed and exciting episodes," but found the story "more than slightly incredible."

Where East Is East is a fairly ridiculous film, with Chaney wasted in an oddly passive role requiring him primarily to stand on the sidelines, glowering his disapproval. But the picture is nonetheless significant in its recapitulation of essential



themes of the Browning canon: marital estrangement, family secrets, sexual revenge, semi-incestuous arrangements between parents and children; degraded, "animalized" protagonists (with names like Tiger, the Black Bird, Cock Robin) often deprived of a normal human attribute like an opposable thumb or upright posture.

The summer of 1929 was turning point for both Chaney and Browning. Chaney had come down with a nagging respiratory infection in the spring while completing location work in Wisconsin for the railroad drama *Thunder* (1929), directed by William Nigh. The underlying cause of Chaney's illness was lung cancer – the actor had long been a heavy smoker – and on July 25 his contract was suspended on grounds of incapacity. The full gravity of his illness was a closely kept secret, and he remained in seclusion for most of the summer and fall of 1929.

Browning had begun preparing the final picture of the three-project contract that had begun with *West of Zanzibar*. The agreement hadn't specified that Browning deliver a talking picture, much less a talking and silent version of the same picture, but that is exactly what M-G-M had in mind for his next production, an adaptation of Bayard Veiller's 1917 stage melodrama *The Thirteenth Chair* (which had earlier been filmed as a silent by Pathe in 1919). The additional payment of \$25,000 Browning received from Metro on April 10, 1929 may reflect the added responsibilities of supervising two separate productions for separate markets.

In the spring of 1929 he entered into new contract negotiations with M-G-M, and it was soon announced in the trades that his next film would be *The Sea Bat*, a "weird story of tropical life and jungle voodoo." Lon Chaney was named as star, but

plans for the picture were put on hold as his health worsened. Beyond *The Thirteenth Chair*, Browning's future at M-G-M became suddenly murky.

The original stage production of *The Thirteenth Chair* had starred the playwright's wife, the British-born, American-trained actress Margaret Wycherly, as a medium named Madame La Grange, who helps trap a murderer among the diplomatic set in Calcutta. Wycherly played the part against type, as a dowdy Irishwoman (in London, the redoubtable Mrs. Patrick Campbell interpreted the role, to great acclaim, in her usual grande dame manner), and recreated the role in Browning's film, her first screen assignment. Leila Hyams and Conrad Nagel provided the love interest.

The cast had originally included Hollywood newcomer Joel McCrea in the Nagel role, but the engagement didn't last. Hyams remembered McCrea as "an unknown, a sort of cowboy come off the range." For the opening scene, the actor was squeezed into an ill-fitting tuxedo. "The sleeves were too short, his hands were too big," Hyams said. "He didn't know how to handle himself at all. The first couple of scenes were so bad they had to take him out."

Hyams recalled that Margaret Wycherly was so intent on upstaging her co-players that it created a problem on the set. "She was full of all the old theatrical tricks, and it was very difficult to play a scene with her." Browning took her aside. "Is she upstaging you? We can't get your face in the camera." Hyams confirmed his suspicions and asked what she could do. Browning told her not to worry. They rehearsed the scene again, and when Wycherly started her tricks again, Browning told her, "Margaret, that isn't your camera," and asked her to play to an alternate lens. The camera was hidden in a soundproof box, and Wycherly never knew it wasn't running.

In the role of the mercilessly interrogative police inspector, Browning cast the Hungarian actor Bela Lugosi, who had just scored a tremendous stage success in New York and California in the Hamilton Deane and John L. Balderston adaptation of *Dracula*. *The Thirteenth Chair* is of particular interest to Lugosi aficionados in that it is probably the best documentation of the actor's acting style during his stage *Dracula* period. Browning's casting of Lugosi is almost perversely inappropriate, unless he was colluding with the actor to produce a screen test for the film version of *Dracula*, which M-G-M and several other studios were then considering. In fact, this may have been exactly the case. There is nothing in the script of *The Thirteenth Chair* to suggest that the police inspector has the temperament and demeanor of a Transylvanian vampire, but that is just how Lugosi played the part, evidently with Browning's full approval. The actor's makeup is aggressively, unnaturally stylized; his eyebrows are pencil-sharpened precisely as they were for the theatrical vampire role; he wears semiformal attire and seems on the verge of hypnotizing everyone in sight. Casting Lugosi was a real stretch in terms of the play – his character, named Delzante in the film to accommodate his accent, was called Donohue in the original script, and provided considerable comic relief. But it is apparent from the actor's first appearance that Browning is intending to showcase Lugosi as a discovery or revelation. The actor stands with his back to the camera, a conspicuous mystery as another detective speaks on the phone. He finally turns to reveal his face, delivering an absolutely ordinary line as if he were lost in darkest Shakespeare.

The buildup is inexplicable in dramatic terms but suggests a significant effort on Browning's part to promote the oddly magnetic performer. Browning offered an explanation in the film's press materials: "On the stage," he said, "the inspector's role had comedy in it, but by playing him as a mysterious figure, dominant and dangerous, I think we enhanced the sense of mystery. Every play has to have comedy, even a mystery drama, but to get it from a central figure in a mystery plot destroys, to my mind, the usefulness of that figure as a mysterious point..."

The Thirteenth Chair is a perfect example of the wax-museum "staginess" that plagued early talkies, although to be fair it must be said that the static

(continued)

qualities evidenced in these films had less to do with any prevailing style of the legitimate theater than to the simple inability of silent-movie directors to handle dialogue. Nowhere in the professional theater did actors speak so slowly or portentously as they did in *The Thirteenth Chair*; as Edward Wales, the story amateur sleuth who comes to a bad end in the middle of a seance, John Davidson gives a zombielike delivery that almost rivals Lugosi's evocation of living death. And perhaps the greatest howler in the script, given Lugosi's accent-smothered diction, is his commanding assertion, "Madame, my words are perfectly clear!"

The newly formed Motion Picture Producers and Distributors of America, convened as an industry watchdog to anticipate and avoid the banning or mutilation of films by state, city, and international censor boards, found Lugosi's performance troubling. W.F. Willis, advising M-G-M on behalf of the MPPDA, was concerned about the inaccurate depiction of a Scotland Yard investigator's actual power of authority in India: "...we have an Inspector, of less rank than the Superintendent, far outside the bounds of authority, coming into the residency of Sir Roscoe, and Sir Roscoe far outranking [Lugosi] politically. And yet the Inspector's attitude is insolent all the way through. His accent betrays him as a Continental, and not British, and to me this aggravates the offence." Willis could not imagine that "a Continental could have risen to an inspectorship without a better sense of the deportment expected in the drawing room of a gentleman in Sir Roscoe's position." There was a practical basis to his concern:

...the falseness of the character...makes all other characterizations false. And perhaps this may have a censorship bearing in the British countries. I do not know how, or even that it will, but I will not be surprised if it does. We have had troubles in the past when we have ad-libbed too much in matters of foreign custom and characterization.

But Willis' most intriguing recommendation to M-G-M is probably the earliest example on record of a now time-honored, if supremely cynical, Hollywood practice - the deliberate planting of extraneous, objectionable material, simply to allow censors to feel that they have accomplished something:

*I have an uncertain feeling regarding the possible attitudes of the censors [regarding *The Thirteenth Chair*]. I cannot see a single point to which I believe they will have reasonable objection, and yet I have the fear that some of them will think they must do something to it. I cannot even guess what. It is a freak picture, and whatever the censors may do will be freak action. Here is a case where I think it will be wise for us to give them something definite to do. Perhaps they will try to create objection to the scenes of Edward Wales when his corpse sits in the chair for the climax...Therefore I suggest the inclusion of the most ghastly close-up we may have if it can be done without interfering with the sound record.*

The Thirteenth Chair, released on Friday the 13th of December 1929, showed only half the profit (\$148,000) of Browning's recent pictures with Chaney. It no doubt dawned on Browning that the new Hollywood would force him to share creative responsibilities in ways that were alien to him. He had created his most striking effects working directly and intimately with actors versed in pantomime; now layers of skilled intermediaries were required: screenwriters and sound technicians had almost as much influence as the director. Dialogue couldn't be doctored after the fact by a title-card writer - it had to be right the first time, on the set. But Browning wasn't a stage director and could offer little technical advice in matters of vocal projection and pacing. His most bankable collaborator was as reluctant to do a sound picture as he had been, and was gravely ill to boot; their plans for *Dracula* seemed a pipe dream at best. A vast migration of stage-trained actors from the East had already begun, and the stock market crash of November 1929 had shaken the New York theater world further, forcing another wave of talkative talent westward. Browning was at a crossroads, and for the moment chose not to make a decision. He was drinking again.



The Unholy Three, 1925.

though not as self-destructively as he had before; press statements that he "hasn't touched a drop of liquor in years" were technically true, but only if one made a distinction between alcohol derived from hard spirits and that obtained from beer, his new drink of choice.

He picked up his last salary from M-G-M at the end of August and took an extended trip to Europe with Alice. He was not offered, or did not sign, a new contract with M-G-M for the first time in five years, he was without a film, a studio, or a paycheck. ■

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DAVE STEVENS



King's Cross, London

Interview by Michael Copner

For two years *Cult Movies* has basked in the glory of cover art designed and executed by Dave Stevens. His colorization and detail work on the Lugosi/White Zombie cover of our 13th issue was hailed as one of the finest covers designed for a film or monster magazine in recent years. Renowned for his period glamour art as well as the success of his Rocketeer comic book character, Dave continues to astound us with his attention-getting compositions.

Our Dave Stevens interview several issues

back drew much favorable response. Here is the continuation of that coffee clutch.

Cult Movies: Tell us about that Godzilla movie.

Stevens: The Godzilla 3-D movie was supposed to be filmed in 1984. Steve Miner was going to direct, and Fred Decker was writing the script. Bill Stout did all the production illustrations to get the financing and would also serve as production designer for the film. They brought me and Doug Wildey in to do presentation boards. We'd take sections of the script and do large illustrations of scenes; these weren't just little storyboard frames.

And Doug did some amazing artwork, illustrating the action.

Steve Cherkis was brought in to do the three foot tall stop motion model of Godzilla, made of foam and latex with metal armature underneath, and that's what we were using to draw from. The look was radically different from Toho's; it was patterned more on an actual dinosaur. It was sinewy, muscular, not as husky and bloated as the "frog-faced" Godzilla we're so used to seeing. But it did have the serrated spiny plates along the back that light up.

CM: That's a trademark!

DS: Yeah, those had to be there, and I think there were two rows of them. He just looked more dramatic and more fearsome than the Godzilla we're used to. It was just an awesome piece of work. Very inspiring.

And they were talking about getting name talent, like Martin Sheen for the film. But it went on slowly and eventually the word came down that the project was off. Toho was getting ready to do their own Godzilla 1985, so there may have been some time limit involved. I know Toho was unhappy about a few points in our script; at the end Godzilla gets killed. And Toho said, "No, no! Godzilla must not die!"

CM: Were you still on the project when it was cancelled?

DS: I don't remember for sure. I was on it for about three months in the spring of 1983. It may have been several months later.

CM: At one time Ray Harryhausen was mentioned in connection with a Godzilla film; was that the same one you were working on?

DS: It may have been. Steve Minor had a bunch of us meet at a screening room in Century City, and they ran the original Godzilla — the Japanese version, not the American one. He wanted us to get a fresh look at the film. Dave Allen was there, Jim Danforth, and many other stop-motion animators, as well as various writers and artists. I don't believe Harryhausen was at that screening, but I could be wrong. Steve wanted to make a powerful film, and this screening was the rallying point for us all, like a pep talk before we "went to battle."

CM: When did you actually create The Rocketeer?

DS: That came about pretty quickly in the Fall of 1981. I was approached to do a back-up feature in another book and they gave me the freedom to do anything I wanted. But they had a time frame problem; they needed it real fast. So I drew up one demo piece that showed what I wanted to do, and wrote the thing around that one drawing and it just took off.



Dave's cover of Dark Horse's *The Shadow and Doc Savage* mini-series.

I did it as a two part filler; I never had any intention of going beyond the two installments (of six pages each). But because of the amount of mail that came in we decided to continue with it. I was in advertising at the time, so I worked the regular jobs during the day and did *The Rocketeer* on my off hours at night.

I was treating it more as a hobby, since there was virtually no money in it. This was before we had Image Comics or any direct sales outlets. In 1981 and '82 it was still just Marvel and DC and they owned everything. When Pacific Comics first started up they were the ONLY company that offered any participation in the publishing rights or royalties for the artists — and that was absolutely revolutionary at the time.

CM: Pacific was the first?

DS: Sure. A little company in San Diego, owned by two brothers; a very small organization that ended up changing the nature of comic publishing and distribution, as we had come to know it.

CM: So you were in at the very beginning of that direct market revolution?

DS: That's true, although I wasn't even a great comic book fan at that time. I just jumped in to see what would happen. Interestingly enough, Steve Miner, who was going to do the *Godzilla* film, was also the first person to option *The Rocketeer* for film — long before Disney. He paid me a small fee for a two year option on it, and we tried to work up a script that we could all agree on. It was fun, but it never developed into any story that worked for all the parties involved. It WAS the first time I'd seen anyone in film give a hoot about comic books — especially an untested property like *Rocketeer*.

CM: What do you think attracted him?

DS: The adventure and the serial trappings. There hadn't been anything in theaters in ages that resembled this except for *RAIDERS OF THE LOST ARK* — which I also worked on for a short time.

CM: On *RAIDERS*? What did you do?

DS: Again it was storyboards. In 1979, Ron

Cobb and Bill Stout were working on *CONAN* for John Milius, and they suggested that I show my portfolio to Spielberg. I did and was hired on the spot. For a trilogy with as many crucial details as the *RAIDERS* films, storyboards are an excellent tool. You can put all the props and technical information that need to be in each shot, and see how that shot needs to look for the final edited scene to work. And it's economical, since you haven't put anything on film yet.

Primarily what Steven would do was to sit down with me before I'd begin each new sequence and tell me how many actors would be in it, what the sets were supposed to look like and how he saw it in his head, and I'd try to visualize it on paper. Sometimes he'd draw pictures with little stick figures, posing the characters and showing the action — sometimes using X's and O's to outline the progression of the movements. He had very specific ideas of what he wanted, and that helped me a lot.

CM: Did this job open a lot of bigger, better doors, or was it just "on to the next job" for you?

DS: Well, it was on to the next job. I took what I could get. One of the older guys at Disney asked me to come over and show 'em my stuff. I could have gotten work, but it would have been at rock bottom wages. After getting great money at Hanna-Barbera and also for Spielberg, it just wasn't possible to go back to that kind of paycheck and still pay my bills. Disney didn't recognize me as a "journeyman layout" artist who COULD work on the features. In the 1970s and '80s Disney had artists clamoring to work there for nothing, just to be able to say they'd worked for Disney. They would have hired me, but only at apprentice wages, in order to re-train me.

CM: So where did you go? What happened?

DS: Well, let's see. Do you remember the *Star Wars* newspaper strip they had for a while? Russ Manning was doing it, but had begun having health problems, so they were thinking of changing artists, and my name came up as a possible replacement. I'd worked for Russ on the *Tarzan* strip years before. So I submitted a few Sunday strips for *Star Wars*, and they loved them. But they wanted me to do six dailies in addition to the Sunday strip single-handedly! There was no way I could have done all the work on my own, so they wanted to know who I could bring in to assist me, and how much I could bring them in for. So I scratched around and talked to several people I'd worked with in animation to find out if any of them were up for a gig on a strip. And at the time I just couldn't find anyone in Los Angeles who was willing to work cheap enough and also work under me, which was a step down for some, so it

wasn't very palatable for them. I went back to Lucas and told them it was too much for me to take on alone and that was that.

So, I went back to advertising for a short spell, doing movie ad art. Then I went to Filmmation to do key art, models and things for *The Lone Ranger* and *Flash Gordon* for Saturday morning TV. I think I was there for about seven months.

CM: This is a great jump in subject matter. And by the time this interview is printed the entire thing may be old news, but at this moment one of the biggest things in Los Angeles is the O. J. Simpson trial. Have you been following that at all?

DS: Out of curiosity as much as anything else, to see how outrageous it's going to get. It's already so overblown and circus-like. The whole procession of events has been so cock-eyed, what with the attorneys, witnesses, jurors and the judge becoming instant authors or celebrities. It's almost comical — even though it is a murder trial and God-forbid



Illustration from Dave's forthcoming book, *The Mad World of Mimi Rodin*.



Lothar returns in the latest chapter of *The Rocketeer Adventure Magazine*. (From *Dark Horse Comics*)

we should be laughing about this. But I do tune in to some of the up-dates and just shake my head!

CM: Being an artist, what did you think of the computer animated demonstration the prosecution presented, showing a black man surprising two victims and killing them?

DS: That kind of thing is dangerous. It was done to show how little time was needed to kill two people. But once it's out there on television and in the public awareness, they can't retract it. It's now a part of the public's collective subconscious.

CM: The demonstration was created to show importance of the element of surprise in a killing, although it plays a little bit like a "you-are-there" documentary.

DS: The human body isn't meant to withstand an attack with a sharp object of any kind. It's very easy, like popping a water balloon. If a person isn't expecting an attack, all they can do is throw up their arms in shock and flail, as they're falling in their own blood. That's it, it's over. There's no struggle. The attacker absolutely has the advantage of surprise.

If nothing else, this trial will sober up a lot of people, especially in big cities, in dangerous neighborhoods. If you're going out for a walk at night, take a pal along with you. Take two! In this case that didn't seem to make much difference, though.

CM: It's a dangerous world out there.

DS: Well, it's definitely not the same world it was 10 or 20 years ago. And here in Los Angeles the feel of the city has changed entirely. In 1961 I rode the streetcars in Huntington Park, and getting around was fun and easy, not the nightmare it is today.

CM: I've heard about the old Red Cars they had here in L. A.

DS: They were the greatest. It was all electric and ran from Hollywood to downtown Los Angeles, and from Pasadena on out to the beach at Santa Monica. It was a wonderful system. Just one of those things that the car and oil companies put a stop to. Politics and greed did it in.

CM: Would you care to talk about the supernatural tenant in your new house?

DS: (Laughter) We could talk about it I guess, if you think anyone's interested.

CM: I'm sure they would be.

DS: Up until about thirteen months ago I was living in a nice ranch style house up in Laurel Canyon, and that house was unbelievably damaged in the last earthquake. I couldn't stay in what was left of the house, so at once I was going through the classifieds and calling people trying to find a new home. As it turned out, on my very first outing, I found the house I'm living in now. With over

ten thousand people displaced by the earthquake, I was pretty lucky to find anything that fast. But within a week I was nearly moved in and everything was getting back to normal. The house is a nice one with an enclosed patio, lots of workspace, etc.

After about a month or so, the landlady visited one afternoon and wanted to talk with me. She's a Chinese lady, very sharp and

business like. She talked for a minute or so and asked if I was happy with the house, and then asked if there had been any strange noises that concerned me. Actually there had been some periodic sounds in the attic above me that I assumed was some small animal; sometimes a raccoon can get up inside an attic and run around on the rafters. But I told her all was well and I was happy with the place. She seemed very relieved by this, then went on to say that previous occupants had moved out complaining that it was haunted and they were disturbed by "walking around" sounds in the night! Although I had been awakened by these noises and they DID seem like footsteps, it never caused me to lose sleep; I'd wake up, recognize the familiar sounds, then go right back to sleep again.

I was just happy to be in a solid house; talk of a "ghost" walking up and down isn't going to cause me to want out. But I've come to realize that it is a very definite sound of someone walking overhead, pacing back and forth above the bedrooms in that space between the ceiling and the roof. The pattern changes a little bit from time to time, and there are periods when it seems more agitated than others; but it's essentially just someone pacing back and forth. Nothing outrageous.

Mimi Rodin rides again! (From the novel)



There was one exception when it got a little odd. It was about 3:00 A. M. and I was up reading, and all of a sudden, the familiar "creak, creak, creak" of the footsteps started overhead, and they paced around the usual number of times; then it took a different route and I could follow it with my eyes fixed to the ceiling as it walked to the area above the kitchen, then on into the dining room. It creaked around in there for a minute and then I heard this loud "Ka-blaam!" — is if it had fallen and landed downstairs IN the living room. Then there were the sounds of it running out of the living room, like it didn't want to get caught and was dashing away at full speed! Amazing.

CM: Directionally it sounded as if it was not overhead anymore, but suddenly right down on floor level?

DS: Yeah. You could tell the change acoustically: big change. As if it had landed in the living room, smack down on the floor.

CM: All good ghosts can walk through walls. But this one fell through the ceiling, then thudded onto your floor???

DS: That's what it sounded like. I guess he forgot he could fly for a minute. And then thought, "Oh no! I'm gonna get caught!" Then ran from the room full tilt. Of course I got up and went in the living room, threw on all the



lights and looked around, but there was nothing amiss.

CM: Has anything ever been moved around at your place?

DS: No, it's just sound, and really just the sound of footsteps. There are no knives flying through the air or anything like that. Sorry!

CM: Has anyone else been with you when these footsteps start up?

DS: Several times I've had friends over and

the sounds have started, and it gets a spooky reaction. One girl started out being real interested in the phenomenon; then as the walking kept on and we talked about it, she got pretty scared.

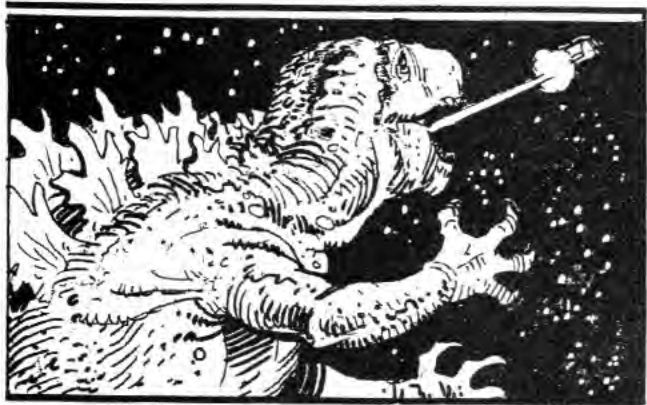
CM: The neat thing about this is that you believe it! Six months ago when you told me about it for the first time you declared that there was absolutely no such thing as a ghost. And yet this thing you didn't believe in was waking you up at night.

DS: Well, the experience of one year in the house changed my mind a bit. And one of the things about it that helped change my mind was the frequency of the occurrences. If I had guests over or if I changed my working hours, this thing might suddenly kick up a fuss and happen a lot. Other times it would be quiet for two or three weeks at a time. There seems to be a personality to it. But it doesn't seem to bear any malice toward me; I've never walked

out and fallen over something that wasn't there before or anything like that. As long as it can live with me, I can live with it.

CM: So you've become a believer!

DS: I guess so. There's just no way this could be the popping or creaking of a house settling. I can distinguish those sounds. This is a walker. And as long as that's all he does, that's fine; because I DON'T want to have to move again!■



Two frames from Wm. Stou's storyboards for the unrealized Steve Miner production of *Godzilla 3-D* (1983).

Backstage With Vincent Price

An Interview Conducted by Bob Madison

In November, 1979, an extremely nervous 16-year old boy was ushered in to meet his all-time hero.

The hero was Vincent Price. I was the boy.

This is what happened. A few months earlier, Vincent Price came to the Roundabout Theater in New York, part of the triumphant tour of his one-man show, *Diversions and Delights*. In it, he starred as the brilliant and tormented Oscar Wilde.

Price's performance of Wilde was the high-water mark of this fine actor's extraordinary career. I had never before, or since, seen such remarkable stagecraft. From his haughty and proud entrance to his sad, poignant farewell, for two hours Vincent Price was Oscar Wilde.

I was a kid who gluttoned and gorged himself on the classic horror films. Of the several actors who, due to their unique presence and unusual abilities, came to be known as "horror stars," Vincent Price was my favorite.

Naturally, I saw the show. I had been sending him letters for a few years, and after the performance he came out to meet me. I told I had loved him my whole life, and he chuckled, patting my cheek and murmuring, "My whole life!" He was simply the most gracious man I have ever met.

Afterwards, the Roundabout house manager said that I could continue to see the show free for the remainder of its run if I worked as an usher. Would I be interested?

You bet.

I got to see Price a great deal over the next few weeks, going backstage for a party he hosted, trading jokes backstage, and general theater horseplay. More avuncular than menacing, Vincent was always ready with a smile and a joke. Once, backstage, the subject of grandfathers came up. He remembered his with a touch of melancholy, while I recalled mine happily. I sometimes caught glimpses of the sober and serious man behind the always amiable extrovert, and liked him all the more for it.

Just before the show closed, I asked for an interview. He begged off, saying he simply didn't have time. Just before closing he was visiting with his grandchildren, and then packing to make a plane. Toronto was next on his itinerary, to shoot his brief role in *Scavenger Hunt*. "Now they call it a cameo role," he joked. "Years ago we called it a bit part."

Hours later, the house manager asked if I was the one who requested an interview. Fearing I was in trouble, I owned up.

"Vincent said he felt very guilty saying no," he said. "So he's coming in early tomorrow to meet you."

So, armed with tape recorder, there I was in his dressing room. He wore an open-necked navy blue shirt, and trousers that sported an enormous belt buckle. He was sticking a few things in a suitcase when I entered. "Robert!" he growled, mock sinister. "Come in here and sit down!"

What were my first impressions? To my 16-year old mind, I thought 68 was ancient, but that Price was man of enormous energy. But not only did he have vitality, but enthusiasm. Hardy and robust, he seemed much younger



Vincent Price turns Bob Madison into the "Murdered Man" aboard the *Bermuda Star*, sailing the Bermuda Triangle October, 1985.

than he was. He was a man who was interesting, and interested! I thought it was neat that my hero was so approachable, and such a sweet man.

I had with me a copy of Parish and Whiteny's *Vincent Price Unmasked*, which I discovered was a book for which he had no particular involvement or respect.

As the interview progressed, he sat in the chair beside me, beginning the make-up job for his role as Wilde. It was odd, there was an enormous mirror before us, and I looked into his reflection and he into mine as we talked. First he applied a foundation, then outlined his lips and eyes. Finally, he used a curling iron on his long, fine white hair to create the Wildcan forelock. To be backstage with Vincent Price as he did his own makeup is an experience I'll never forget. The strongest visual impression I have are of his eyes: they were a deep and rich blue I have never seen on anyone else.

Years later, juggling a minor career as an actor with my college studies, I had the chance to work with him professionally. It was during a murder mystery cruise to Bermuda, produced by Bogie's Murderous Mystery Tours. He had aged considerably in the intervening six years, but his unflagging generosity of spirit remained.

Working with Price as an actor was a great thrill, and opens up a whole different batch of memories. I would like to chronicle the adventure of acting in *Murdered Man* with Vincent Price as we sailed through the Bermuda Triangle, and perhaps it will appear in a future issue of *Cult Movies*.

What follows is the interview taped in 1979. I have recently rediscovered the tape, and it has not appeared in any form anywhere else. Price, ever gracious, started to ask me questions about myself, and the interview soon became more of a chat. He handled the 16-year old that I was with kid gloves, and for that alone my respect for him remains unwavering. I've done very little editing — mostly syntax and interruptions — and I think this candid talk provides a real flavor of the man.

Robert Madison: I wanted to ask you some of these over the past few weeks, but I have to get them down for this interview, and then I'll send you a copy, okay?

Vincent Price: Okay.

RM: Why is the *Invisible Man Returns* often neglected in accounts of your horror film career, and do you have any memories concerning it?

VP: Well, I think one of the reasons is that there was a first one, you know, I mean the original one, and most of the sequels aren't either as successful — although that was a successful movie — but they tend somehow not to incorporate them. I don't know why, because in some biographies of me it's mentioned, and others like the one you read, it may not have been. But it was a very successful picture, all of those *Invisible Man* pictures were successful, because it was the time of science fiction. I don't know why it's not mentioned in the book you read.

RM: It's mentioned, it's just neglected. I don't know why, I really like it.

VP: Yeah, it was a good picture. But they were really very difficult to make in the old days. Today they would use that blue thing that they have —

RM: Bluescreen.

VP: Yeah, but in those days they didn't have it, and what they did was have a set built. In the scenes where you became invisible they draped the whole set in black velvet: all over, the entire set. Then you walked into it, the *Invisible Man*, dressed in black velvet, with any part of you that was supposed to be invisible covered in black velvet. So when they photographed that, and the camera was anchored, you have black velvet on black velvet, so you had the head off and the suit there and no hand or something like that because you were wearing black velvet gloves. [He rises, towering over me to demonstrate.] And there was one scene in it where I undressed a scarecrow.

RM: In a field!

VP: Yeah. It took eight hours to film that! And it was a great field, and they covered the field with black velvet, and I was completely in black velvet! And then I had to undress this scarecrow and do it so that my hands, [he starts to mime the scene] which were cov-

ered in black velvet, never went in front of the scarecrow. Because if they did, there would be a hole in the scarecrow, you see. So it just took hours and hours and hours for us to be able to do it technically so that when they spliced the two films together there was nothing showing of the black velvet against the material.

It was a difficult scene to do, as I say it took eight hours, but on the screen it was only about a minute!

RM: About!

VP: That's all. So it was just endless!

RM: Do you think you got the part because of your voice?

VP: Probable. It was actually one of the very first pictures I ever did.

RM: Fourth.

VP: Was it really the fourth picture?

RM: Yes. When did you first realize, when did it hit you, that you were considered by most people primarily a "horror star?"

VP: That wasn't until *The House of Wax*. You see, actually most of the films — well, as you say, *The Invisible Man Returns* was only the fourth film I ever did — so I hadn't done that much. The first film I ever did was kind of a leading man thing called *Service de Luxe*. And that type of picture was the most popular type at the time, that sort of drawing room comedy.

RM: Screwball stuff.

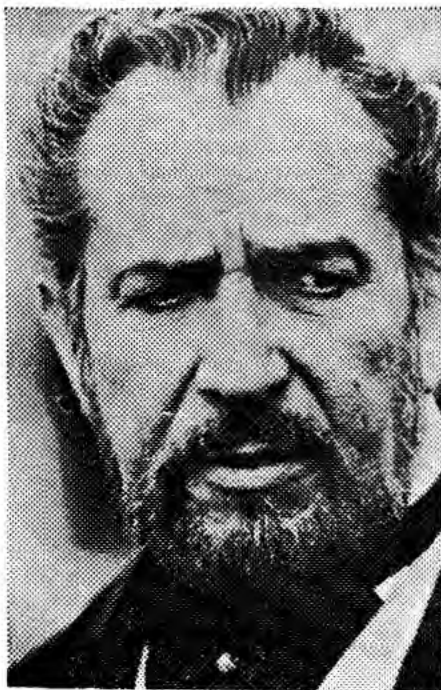
VP: Yeah, and right about the time we made it, they had finished making those pictures, so it didn't really do me any good at all. And I also knew that I wasn't the leading man type, in that sense. I really wanted to be a character actor, and that how I ended up.

RM: Do you mind the way your career has turned out?

VP: Turned out pretty good? Still working. [We laugh.]

RM: No, I mean would you rather have been doing other kinds of things?

VP: Well, I do. *Diversions and Delights* is entirely different from anything I've ever done and it's the biggest success I've ever had. Seriously, I think with the exception of the first town I played it in, in San Francisco,



The Oblong Box.

where a couple of the critics said that they had seen me do so many horror pictures that they were amazed to see me do this. But of over 100 movies I've only done about 20 horror pictures. So, it isn't a very big average. And I'm essentially a character actor, you know. Only about three of them have make-up, as such.

RM: Of the William Castle films you've done, which do you like the most?

VP: Well, I think *The House on Haunted Hill* was really a very funny, kooky idea. I must say I did enjoy that. It was such a far out, wild idea, and worked? He was really quite an extraordinary man, Bill Castle. Mad!

RM: He passed away recently, didn't he?

VP: Yeah, died about two years ago.

RM: I really loved *The Tingler*.

VP: Yes, I did too. *The Tingler* I liked. He really did some wonderful tricks. For instance, you remember that the only scene of *The Tingler* that's in color is the scene where the hand comes out of the bathtub filled with blood.

RM: I had seen that for the first time when I was about eight years old, and there's that wonderful bit where the screen goes dark and you say, "Scream! Scream for your life, the Tingler is loose!" I was watching it in the house in the dark, and it scared the life out of me!

VP: You saw it on television?

RM: Yes.

VP: Yeah.

RM: Only television cuts everything up.

VP: Oh yes, they murder everything. The only time I watch television is if it's on the educational channel, public television. They don't cut it.

RM: They're doing a lot of musicals on public television now.

[He moves to the other side of the partition and starts to get into costume.]

VP: They're what?

RM: They're doing a lot of musicals on public television. The classic MGM pictures. It's great to see them uncut.

VP: Yeah. What do you want to do with yourself? What are your plans?

RM: I've already started. I'm a writer.

VP: Are you? Good!

RM: I've been writing for years.

VP: Jesus!

RM: Have you ever read *The Working Artist*?

VP: *The Working Artist*?

RM: Yeah.

VP: No.

RM: Oh, I write stories for them.

VP: *The Working Artist*?

RM: And *Mystery Monthly*.

VP: You do?

RM: I'll send you copies, if you'd like to see one.

VP: Oh, I'd never have any time. I've 42 scripts at home that I have to read.

RM: 42!?

VP: I'll try, Bob, but, really, usually I'm so busy doing what I'm doing, and I try to cut it down a bit.

RM: Of your Roger Corman movies, the Poe films, which one did you have the most fun making?

VP: I would think *The Raven*, because the people in it were such wonderful people. Boris and Peter, besides the fact that there wasn't a word of sense in the film! So it was kind of fun to do because Roger had no intention of making it into a comedy.

RM: No?



The Bribe.

VP: None. It was only when Peter and I, and Boris, decided that this had no reality at all — you know, the poem has no plot! — that Roger started to see that we were sending it up. And we did that, we were the ones, and then Roger went along with it, as a comedy.

RM: There's one line in that, where Peter Lorre wants bat's wings, and you say, "We don't have that, we've vegetarians!"

VP: [Laughs] Yes!

RM: My next question you've practically answered. In the Corman movies, you worked with Karloff and Basil Rathbone. What was it like working with them?

VP: Oh wonderful. They were great friends of mine, long-time friends, so it was always sort of a reunion every time we made a picture together. It was great fun. And we were all really rather serious about trying to make films that were good films of their kind. There was no point in trying to make them into another kind of film. You've got to stick within the genre in which you're working.

RM: Don't mix them.

VP: No. In order to make it into a great masterpiece of a film, that isn't done! What you do is make it into a masterpiece of its kind!

RM: Is there any possibility of a *Dr. Phibes* sequel?

VP: Yes, a possibility. I loved those films. The same fellows who wrote the original script have a very good script.

RM: Is Hitler a character in it? I heard a rumor somewhere that Hitler was one of the characters in the third movie.

VP: Well, they've written about four different scripts, and the trouble is now, you see, those pictures were made with a very low budget, in England. To make one of those pictures now, in America now, because the English motion picture industry is pretty skinny right now, would cost about two and half million dollars. That's the budget they'd have to put out. And AIP feels that's too high a budget to put on a sequel. And they may be right, I don't know.

RM: The first one was very successful!

VP: Oh, very.

RM: You would think it would be a good gamble.

VP: I do, too. But AIP is trying to change

(continued)



The Last Man On Earth.

their image, and they're not doing really well because the only picture that they had that was real success that they made was *The Amityville Horror*, which is just another horror picture, isn't it?

RM: Yes. I thought it was fair.

VP: I thought it was fair, too. But they didn't know what they were doing, and the people in it were terrible, I thought. Dreadful.

RM: It works much better as a book.

VP: Oh sure, much. You're absolutely right. It's a good book, I read it.

RM: The *Phibes* films showed you have great comedic abilities with your pantomime and sight jokes. Would you like to do a straight comedy?

VP: Well, they were straight comedy, really.

RM: I mean straight, slapstick, Peter Sellers type stuff.

VP: Oh, yes I'd love to do that! As a matter of fact, I've done a lot of it on television. Years ago, when John Frank and I first started out, I did a lot of wild, comedic things with him. I've done a lot of it, but, with the older television shows, they don't show them anymore! I was on *Playhouse 90* and things like that, and a host of comedy shows, but I don't know if they even exist anymore. Some of them were absolutely wonderful. I wish they were kept.

RM: And you did some great funny stuff on the *Red Skelton Show*.

VP: Yes, I did all the Skelton shows. They were pure farce!

RM: Did you make-up most of your material as you went along? It seems so spontaneous.

VP: Red was really a comedic genius. And he would give you things in context with the script.

RM: I remember one bit, the two of you were in a museum, and he points and says, "A De Vinky!" And you counter with "Yes! An oreggino!"

VP: "An oreggino De Vinky," that was his line!

RM: In *Vincent Price Unmasked*, you said that you love acting because it opens all other doors. How so?

VP: Well, being in any one art, and being successful in it, opens doors to everything else in the arts. If you become a successful writer, it will open every door for you. I mean for all the things that you are curious enough to want to do, that is a very true statement. And you better do them, because that's what life is all about, that's the other thing!

I had better shut up and do this [He uses a thin paint brush to trace the outline of his lips.] For instance, in the other arts, in the art of painting, I've had a marvelous kind of life in that art, through being an actor. I would've never been, for instance, working with the government with Indian arts and crafts had I not been an actor. I wasn't an expert on Indian art, although I'm pretty much so now, because of being exposed to it through this government work.

I would never have been on Mrs. Kennedy's White House Art Committee if I hadn't been an actor and interested in the arts. So you see, it has opened up a lot of other doors for me.

RM: Do you prefer stage to films?

VP: Yes.

RM: Why?



[A stage hand enters, bringing towels.]

VP: Everyone does. The audience. And working with tacky people like [he points to the dresser and we all laugh.] It's much more fun, the theater.

RM: How did your long love affair with art begin? Do you remember what first inspired you to look into it?

VP: No, I was born in St. Louis, Missouri, where somebody else I know was born [he and the stage hand, also a St. Louis native, yuck it up], and if you had any sensitivity at all, which some of us had in the sticks, they had a marvelous museum, and you were forced to go to it when you were a kid. It was really a very good museum, and I would stay there all day. I'm a museum go-er.

RM: And what lured you into cooking?

VP: My mother. In fact, I've just had a letter from my sister recently who read an article where I said it was my mother who inspired us to cook, an she said, "You're a big liar! That's not true, mother never let us in the kitchen!" But in truth, she never let my sister in the kitchen because all she knew how to do was make wilted lettuce! And my sister always hated cooking, but I loved it! I used to help serve and then I was allowed to cook,

and I've kept it up. I like it! All the best cooks are men, anyway.

RM: In Italy and France.

VP: And America! You never heard of "Millie of the Waldorf," it's Oscar of the Waldorf. Never Millie, really.

RM: When did you start doing *Diversions and Delights*, and how did it come to you?

VP: About 37 years ago! No, really, about two and a half years ago in San Francisco, and it came to me in the absolute ordinary and direct channels in the theater: it was sent by the author to a director, who felt I was right for it. He said that if I will do it, he will do it. I didn't know if I should, but my wife, who's a much better play-reader than I am said, "You do it! You do it, you lazy bastard!" Those were her exact words. So I did it, and it's really kind of a marvelous thing to have. A one-man show is a marvelous thing to have because it's kind of an annuity — you can pack it up and move it out and take it on the road.

RM: And you don't have to worry about anything or anyone else.

VP: No! And it's also a very simple show, my requirements are almost nil. This summer, I did it in two summer theaters and it was just a godsend to them, because one of them had, just before I got there, that, what was that play about Sherlock Holmes?

RM: *Crucifer of Blood*.

VP: Which had 39 sets and 72 actors and wrecked the theater. Because they had to build all of this stuff, you know, in Westport, it just ruined them. It had a very, very fine actor in it.

RM: Paxton Whitehead.

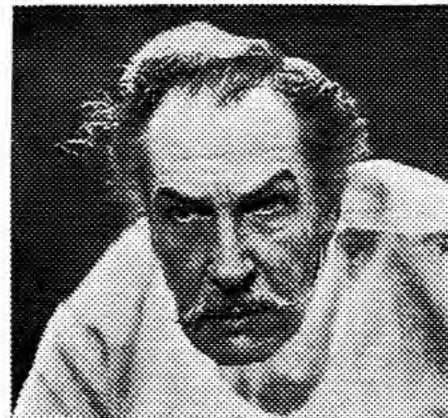
VP: But he wasn't really very well known. So in one week in summer stock you've got to have somebody who's a draw, who is well known, or else the play has got to be a huge draw. Well, *Crucifer of Blood* wasn't that huge a draw. They did it also in Denver, when I was there. It did well, but it never paid back its investment. The investment in Denver, in particular, was huge, because it was amazing. It had 12 sets and ships and it was this outrageous thing!

And so, you know, to have an actor come in with a show that costs a \$1.98 is a big help. This show was a big success in both Westport and Denver, critically and audience-wise, and every other way. So to have a show that some summer company can bring in that doesn't cost anything is an absolute guarantee. They sure make back their money!

RM: Would you like to play Sherlock Holmes?

VP: No, not really. No, not really.

RM: He's a great character.



Theatre of Blood

VP: It's a wonderful character. I'm afraid that having known Basil Rathbone terribly well that I would've ended up doing Basil Rathbone. He was the ultimate Sherlock Holmes.

RM: He was better than just about every one else.

VP: Much.

RM: Though Peter Cushing was a very worthy Sherlock Holmes.

VP: Peter was all right, but Basil had a kind of marvelous arrogance. He was just sensational. He was just wonderful. And it was a big problem for him, too, as you know.

RM: He couldn't get anything else.

VP: He couldn't get anything else. And it came at a point of his life where the major part of his career was kind of over and this was something that he did — one picture that was intended, in his way of thinking, that was just intended to be part of the overall picture of his career. But it became so successful that they did all of those sequels. And Basil just got stuck in it. And it certainly kept him alive, and made him terribly famous. I don't know whether his estate gets anything now through those pictures, though I doubt it, because they never let actors share in those things.

RM: Back to *Diversions and Delights* and Oscar Wilde. Do you admire wit, and think it's a sign of intelligence?

VP: Oh yes. The ultimate sign of intelligence. Wit, not funniness. That's the trouble with modern television. It's funny but not really witty. You know exactly what I mean.

RM: Funny is fairly easy, but wit has some element of truth behind it.

VP: That's right.

RM: Anyone can do shtick.

VP: Shtick is what most comedians do. Take the Wilde thing, there isn't a single double meaning, there isn't even vaguely dirty word, and yet it's funnier than 90 percent of the stand-up comics in the world. Because it is real wit.

RM: Especially the fables, particularly the one about the actor... [In the play, Wilde tells the story of a theater fire. While the audience started to crawl over and trample one another to reach the exits, a resourceful actor climbed on-stage and commanded silence. After instructing the patrons to go back to their seats, he runs down the center aisle, through the doors, and was never seen again. The theater fills with smoke and not another person escaped alive. As Wilde, Price finishes the story: "Now you may ask, what is the moral, what lesson can we learn from this tale? Well, it's always a foolish thing to take advice, and to take good advice is absolutely fatal."]

VP: Yes. Wonderful.

RM: I've heard it several times now, and it never fails to make me laugh.

VP: It's a very funny thing, wonderful story.

RM: When you play Wilde, you alter your speech pattern. Why?

VP: Well, number one, I'm trying as hard as I can to be as close to Wilde as I can. Wilde had a very peculiar speech pattern that was very famous. It was called an Irish Protestant Accent. He and Bernard Shaw had it, and it was that kind of that meticulous pronunciation of every single syllable. "Eve-en-ing."

RM: Like he's eating the word. "De-bauch-ery."

VP: Yeah! "De-bauch-ery!" And all that kind of thing. Also, there were many, many descriptions of Wilde's voice, and what it was

like. He had very bad teeth, like most Englishmen did at that time, and he used to talk like that, [he demonstrates] sort of wrapping his lips around his teeth, which I try and do. I also raise my voice to a different pitch. And also, I'm terribly well known for my voice, and I don't want to have that voice. Because if I had that voice, I'd still be Vincent Price, you see.

RM: Kill the whole effect.

VP: Hmm, hmm. Absolutely.

RM: How much research did you do on Wilde before you attempted to do him on stage?

VP: Well I did it at the same time, and since. I have a marvelous director. When I created the part, I found it very difficult to know too much. You should enter a part with a kind of innocence, a kind of openness. And what the director wants, what he feels and everything,



guides you through.

I did a play one time, a Tennessee Williams one-act play, and suddenly in the middle of it I came to the director (who had given me some wonderful things to do), and I said the one thing that's wrong is the voice. I'm playing it like myself, and what it really needs [here he changes his voice completely to a syrupy, Southern drawl] is a really thick Southern accent, like a man who sort of talks under his teeth. And the minute I did that, when I made that over, the other things that were given to me by the director worked. It would not have worked had I done that right at the beginning, because you have to grow into it.

So a lot of the research I did was done during the rehearsals, and after we starting trying it out.

RM: Do you know if Wilde said anything about Edgar Allan Poe, or if he didn't, what do you think his opinion of Poe would've been? Wilde seemed to think all writers were a cut below him.

VP: A lot of Wilde was putting people on. It was his way of humor. Cutting people down, that's one of the great basis's of humor, this

kind of deprecation.

[At this point, the stagehand returns.]

Stagehand: I didn't mean to interrupt, but it's almost one o'clock and remember that you have to take care of all of —

RM: When does the play start?

VP: Two. But I've got to pack.

RM: Okay. I'll hurry this up.

VP: All right.

RM: What do you read in your leisure time?

VP: *Wifey*! [Laughter.]

Stagehand: [Halfway out the door.] Couldn't walk away after I heard that!

VP: I knew that! I knew that!

RM: He gave you *Wifey*?

VP: Yeah, he gave me a dirty book to read on the airplane.

RM: I know. I've read it. You recently did a Halloween special that was designed to induce children to read. Do you think children's aversion to reading is a serious problem, and to what extent is television responsible?

VP: So much has been written about it, you've probably read a lot of it. I think television is very responsible for keeping kids from reading. But it isn't television so much as the fact that they're allowed to watch it. They get hooked on it. Somebody called it in its early days "the electronic nurse." It's a way to take care of your kids and get out yourself and get away from them.

RM: The lobotomy box.

VP: Yeah. And I think that program has a validity in that it says that here's something that's really a lot more exciting than a lot of stuff you're watching, and we'll tell you a little bit about it to wet your interest.

RM: Think it worked?

VP: So I think even 50 people is something.

RM: That means that you've touched somebody.

VP: To me, 50 people means more than those God damn Nielsen ratings, don't you think?

RM: I don't put much stock in Nielsen ratings.

VP: No, they're terrible.

RM: Your series *Time Express* didn't work out.

VP: No.

RM: Why do you think so?

VP: Well, two reasons. They, the networks, are scared of anything that's different from what's on the air.

RM: It was different.

VP: It was different. I thought it was kind of good, in parts. I also think they didn't develop the stories very well. They got scared of the two characters my wife and I played, and they didn't know what to do with them. And they just blew it off.

RM: What should've been done with them?

VP: Well, I think they should've had much more involvement in the story.

RM: With the people in the story, not just guiding the train!

VP: And that's what they were going to do if it had been picked up. But, of course CBS, which paid for the show, put it on against *Mork and Mindy*.

RM: The kiss of death.

VP: Kiss of death. We were destroyed before we even went on the air.

RM: Who was the most lovely and exciting actress you worked with?

VP: Oh, I've worked with an awful lot of them. I think probably the best actress I ever worked with was Lorette Taylor. You wouldn't know who she was, she did *The Glass Me-*

(continued)



This fine caricature, based on Comedy of Terrors, was made for American International by noted artist Jack Manning. Vincent Price is featured among the horror stars.

was a very, very fine director, didn't understand those kind of people.

And so, that's what happened. [Pats my back.] Now I have to get going!

RM: Okay.

VP: All right.

RM: Thank you very, very much.

VP: Good luck to you! Thank you!

RM: And you.

VP: Bye. All right, I'll see you out there! [To dresser.] Now, what have I got to pack, now? Come on!

Here I turned off the tape recorder. But before I left, I gave Price a small gift. I remember the two of us in the glow of the dressing mirror light — he was heroically tall, and in Oscar Wilde make-up, he was truly a creature of myth. He had a delightful smile, and his eyes actually sparkled. I know it's cliché, but they did. He opened the package with great ceremony. It was a copy of Hoffman's excellent *Poe, Poe, Poe, Poe, Poe, Poe, Poe, Poe, Poe, Poe*. Jokingly, he said

he'd read it on the plane. "Once I finish *Wifey!*"

He then looked me right in the eye, and said, "Someday, you will write a best-seller, and I'll hate you forever."

That's what he was like.

Vincent Price was one of nature's true gentlemen. He had the happy talent of putting other people at ease, and including them. One of the most remarkable men of his generation, he was a true Renaissance man: actor, art expert and advocate, writer, and collector. I somewhat regret that when I cornered him with a tape recorder I was only 16, and the best I could do was ask him about the *Dr. Phibes* films. But Price was a such a warm, amiable man that he happily supplied his genre-hungry fans with any information they wanted — and made it seem important.

Not only the world of fantastic films, but the world at large is diminished by his loss, and his memory is surely one to treasure. ■

nagerie, she was...

RM: I've seen *The Glass Menagerie*.

VP: You've never seen it with her, she died before you were born!

RM: No, I've seen the play!

VP: Right. But, she was probably the greatest American actress. And, certainly, Helen Hayes.

RM: With whom you worked early in your career.

VP: That's right, for two years. That was an extraordinary thing.

RM: Is there any movie you've done, that while doing it, you had grave doubts about it?

VP: All of them!

RM: but when it was released it had great critical and public response?

VP: I had certain doubts about *Laura*. Not because I hadn't thought the story was marvelous, and certain parts of it were marvelous, and everything was good about it. But we had a lot of problems, because the pro-

ducer kicked the original director, Reuban Mamoulian, off of the picture and took over the direction himself. And he was right. But the cast, all of us, really had no understanding of what had gone wrong. And when we went back to work and re-shot the whole thing with another director, we really were worried because we didn't see what he was doing. It was Otto Preminger. He made all the difference on the picture being a success or not.

RM: Clifton Webb was brilliant in that film.

VP: Wonderful. Wonderful. Preminger made it a picture about evil people.

RM: And just about everybody in that picture is evil in some way.

VP: Everybody. Everybody. Way underneath, not on top, not openly so.

RM: Especially Lydekker...

VP: Lydekker, a really evil man.

RM: But that was his charm.

VP: That's right. But Otto understood those kind of people. And the original director, who

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EURO-SLEAZE MASTERPIECES:

The films in this section are dubbed in English unless otherwise noted.

CALIGULA 2: Totally uncut Joe D'Amato erotic epic about orgies in Imperial Rome! See a spear shoved up a guy's ass right in front of his frantic family! Plus hardcore sex and fun inhuman torture. (XXX)

THE DEMONS: Jesús Franco rips-off THE DEVILS with hilariously sleazy results! Nubile naked nuns are taken & tortured by the evil Inquisition! One of them really is a witch and seduces her tormentors, turning them into skeletons after sex! Lots of possessed masturbating Satanic nuns! (X)

EMANUELLE IN AMERICA: Totally uncut version! Joe D'Amato and Laura Gemser bring you the sickest & sexiest Emanuelle film yet! Sex-crazed nympho reporter must stop a sinister cult of misogynist madmen who are brutally torturing & murdering naked women for profit! Grossome beyond belief, yet crammed full of hardcore sex and bizarre kinks! (XXX)

HITCH-HIKE: "LAST HOUSE ON THE LEFT" star David Hess returns to rape & terrorize in this tense Italian psycho-thriller. Very rare. (X)

IMAGES IN A CONVENT: In Italian only. D'Amato's devil-nuns whip themselves into a nympho-frenzy! See the perverted pawas of Satan! (XXX)

INQUISITION: Hooded torturers rip off women's nipples with pliers and Laura Gemser plays Satan, presiding over a demonic witch orgy in the pits of hell! Bug-eyed hunchback rapes & murders suspected witches for the love of Jesus! Wow! (X)

LILLIAN THE PERVERTED VIRGIN: In Spanish language only. Jesús Franco's tragic tale of a runaway girl kidnapped by rich sadists & transformed into a dope-addicted sex slave! (XXX)

LOVE LETTERS OF A PORTUGUESE NUN: Jesús Franco satanic nun sex-n-torture picture! Masturbating lesbian witches conjure up Satan to have anal sex with a nubile young virgin before your unbelieving eyes! Spectacular sleaze; one of Franco's very best! Uncut. (X)

NAZI LOVE CAMP 27: Uncut hardcore version with Nazi rapists on the rampage! Includes original theatrical trailer & 30 min. of disgusting Nazi sex-n-torture movie previews! You'll love it!!!

PERVERSE COUNTESS: In Italian language only. Uncut Franco fave stars Alice Arno as a flesh-eating lesbian killer and Lina Romay as her sexy prisoner! Crazy Countess captures girls for sex and food!!! (XXX)

POOR CECILY: Poor little rich girl is sold into slavery and must learn how to please her masters the (ahem!) hard way! When she runs away, she is whipped, raped & tortured in a dungeon full of accused witches! One of the best big-budget sex-fests ever made (we mean it!). (X)

SS EXTERMINATION CAMP: Evil Nazi sadists torture screaming naked women in the ultimate perverted gross-out freak-fest! Insane uterus transplants, bald pervert tit-maniacs, rape, mass murder, more! (X)

AMAZING ASIAN SEXY SHOCKERS:

The films in this section are NOT in English unless otherwise noted.

BONDAGE FANTASIA: Spectacular collection of S&M eroticism! Hot! (X)

BEAUTIFUL DEAD BODY: Wizard rapist keeps girls in coffins! (XXX)

ENTRAILS OF A VIRGIN: Demon-rapist rips out woman's intestines through her vagina! Crazy lady masturbates with severed hand! Yikes! (X)

GHOUL SEX SQUAD: Wacky wizard vs. vampire rapists! Subtitled (XXX)

LUST NEVER DIES: Undead creeps crave fresh virgin meat! Sexy! (XXX)

MIND FUCK: Ninjas, vampires and hardcore sex! Wow! Subtitled. (XXX)

SUPER NAKED & POWER PUSSY: Nude lady superheroes fly through the air with magic kung-fu vaginas and kill Japanese Nazis! Unbelievable. (X)

TALES OF THE WOMEN NINJA 3: Naked ninjas squirt acid out of their tits & spin webs out of their vaginas! Trashy violence! (X)

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GROSS-OUT GORY HORROR FLICKS:

The films in this section are all made or dubbed in English except where noted.

THE ALIENATORS (1988): Actually released in foreign markets as both "ALIEN 3" & "TERMINATOR 2" (!) by greedy Italian producers, this terrible rip-off tells the story of scientists turned into "Alien" monsters by the evil "Tubular Corporation". Foul-mouthed Space Marines are sent to exterminate, but are themselves murdered by "Terminator" robots sent in by the evil corporation to cover up their mistake! Mind-bogglingly bad sci-fi/horror will have you gasping in disbelief! Order and see!

AUTOPSY (1974): Uncut! Sick chick fantasizes about sex-crazed corpses coming back to life to have sex with her in the morgue! Disgusting; see naked blood-caked zombies lusting after her & each other! Gross! (X)

THE BEYOND (1981): Uncut, letterboxed Lucio Fulci zombie splatter classic serves up a tasty spread of face-melting acid baths, eye-gouging & flesh-eating tarantulas!!! Easily Fulci's best and most atmospheric film.

CANNIBAL HOLOCAUST (1979): Uncut bloodbath of grotesque rape and horror delivers all the splatter that matters: see naked girls impaled vagina-thru-mouth on sharpened sticks, cannibals ripping fetuses out of pregnant women & then stoning them to death, decapitation, disembowelling, animal mutilation, more! A real sickie! (X)

CAT IN THE BRAIN (1988): Uncut Lucio Fulci gore spectacle stars Fulci as himself (!) & naked girl chainsawed into lunchmeat & fed to pigs, Nazi orgies, eye-gouging, gory murders, etc.

DEMON APOCALYPSE (1992): Clawed demon hand rips out of the Bible to crush a priest's nuts! Possessed police detectives stab forks in victim's arms! Devil-worshipping freaks massacre people with machetes! Zombies attack when Satan takes over the earth! Bloody chainsaw dismemberment, intestine-ripping, throat-severing horror!!! Who will survive the terror?

DEMONIA (1986): Uncut, letterboxed Lucio Fulci. The ghosts of toposless nun sluts roast babies alive and murder men with spearguns (!). One poor bastard is ripped in half, then completely apart in the goriest splatter EVER!

GRIM REAPER (1980): Uncut Joe D'Amato favorite has degenerate cannibal maniac rip open a pregnant woman's belly & eat her flopping fetus in gory detail! A violent trash classic; 10 minutes longer than U.S. release!!!

GUINEA PIG (1989): In Japanese language only. Psycho-samurai sadist slowly dismembers helpless woman in excruciating agony! Pus-infected mermaid squeezes worms out of her bloody boils & is chopped to pieces by insane artist painting her portrait in her own pus! First-rate special effects are among the finest seen anywhere; you can't find a more disgusting movie!

MERCENARY CANNIBALS (1985): Super-gory, crazy rip-off of "APOCALYPSE NOW" from South East Asia! Bloodthirsty cannibal army called "The Dracula" (!) runs a drug-smuggling operation in Vietnam and it's up to a ruthless band of horny kung-fu mercenaries to stop them! Castration, mutilation, decapitation, brain-eating, knives thru head, eye-gouging, impaling all-out action will astound even the most jaded movie fan. You simply must see this film, it's sooooo goddamn funny and over-the-top!!!

TOMBS OF THE BLIND DEAD (1971): Uncut! Blood-drinking satanic zombie warriors rip open helpless women with swords at their haunted castle! Includes the previously unseen "train massacre" sequence!

ZOMBIE 3 (1987): Uncut, letterboxed Lucio Fulci sequel. Zombie virus wipes out the world! Survivors must fight the U.S. army and the zombies!

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MURDERS IN THE RUE MORGUE

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Synopsis

In 1845, at a Parisian carnival, Pierre Dupin and his fiancée Camille enter the sideshow tent of "Erik the Ape." Inside, the ape's owner, Dr. Mirakle, gives a brief lecture on evolution. (This a full 14 years before Darwin published his *Origin of Species*. If Mirakle had been a little saner, perhaps we'd be studying Mirakle's theory of evolution in school rather than Darwin's?!) As Mirakle concludes his oration, he draws the curtain of Erik's cage and announces dramatically, "Behold — the first man." Mirakle answers shouts of "heresy" from the audience with animated talk of his "great experiment." "I shall prove your kinship with the ape," he claims above his listeners' protests. "Erik's blood shall be mixed with the blood of man!" After the show, Pierre and Camille approach Erik's cage to get a closer look. Suddenly, Erik snatches the bonnet from Camille's head and then nearly throttles Pierre when the young man tries to retrieve it. The ape is taken with her — as is Dr. Mirakle, who watches with an unhealthy curiosity.

Later that night, Mirakle and Erik follow Camille to her residence. They move on, however, and Mirakle soon spies a streetwalker in near-hysterics after witnessing two men kill each other over her in a deadly streetfight. Mirakle first cajoles, then forces, the girl to enter his carriage, upon which she screams and they drive off. At a secret laboratory, Mirakle injects her with a sample of Erik's blood. When she dies, Mirakle blames his failure on her own contaminated blood. "Your blood is rotten, black as your sins," he rails at the corpse.

The girl's body is fished out of the river (the third such victim) and brought to the morgue. Pierre Dupin, a medical student, arrives at the morgue to procure "supplies." When he examines the fresh body, he notices "the same marks" on the corpse's arm as on those of the previous two victims. Pierre bribes the attendant for a blood sample, in which he finds "the same foreign substance in the blood of each victim... something introduced into the bloodstream to cause their death."

Camille receives a new bonnet from Dr. Mirakle, who asks her to visit him that night. Upon learning of this, Pierre goes in her stead and receives a curt dismissal from the disappointed doctor. His suspicions aroused, Pierre follows Mirakle and watches him enter an abandoned house.

That night, Mirakle goes to Camille's apartment, but the frightened girl shuts the door in his leering face. Not to be denied, Mirakle sends Erik into the house after her. Meanwhile, Pierre discovers that the "foreign substance" in the women's blood is the blood of a gorilla. Suddenly concerned for Camille, he races off towards her apartment.



Erik climbs up the side of the building and enters Camille's room, upon which the girl screams and faints. Her cry awakens her mother, who rushes into the room only to confront the enraged Erik. Pierre arrives as the mother's screams and Erik's howls arouse the building's other residents. With help, Pierre breaks down the door. Inside they find Camille gone and the body of her mother stuffed up the chimney. Dupin tells the Prefect of Police about Mirakle and his ape, but the police think him insane. Gorilla hair clutched in the corpse's hand finally convinces them otherwise, and Pierre leads the gendarmes to Mirakle's house.

As the police try to break in, Mirakle lets Erik out of his cage. When Mirakle approaches the unconscious Camille, however, Erik goes ape and strangles his master (presumably because the simian has fallen in love with her — though this is only hinted at and never made clear). The gendarmes shoot Mirakle's servant, Janos, and break in, but Erik has carried Camille to the roof. Pierre follows as the gorilla races across the rooftops of Paris. Finally, Pierre corners Erik and shoots him with a gendarme's borrowed pistol. As Erik rolls off the roof into the rushing river below, Pierre and Camille embrace. At the morgue, the dour atten-

dant receives the body of Dr. Mirakle.

Memorable Moment

The picture's strongest sequence, both visually and emotionally, is also its most brutal. After Mirakle escorts the prostitute into his carriage, the screen fades to black. A scream of terror emanates from the darkness and the screen lightens to reveal the shadow of a woman tied to a giant X-shaped rack. A man's shadow enters the frame. As the woman shrieks and struggles, the man speaks: "Be patient. Are you in pain, mademoiselle? It will only last a little longer." After uttering these chilling words, the shadow raises a hand and moves menacingly toward the writhing figure on the cross, merging with it into one indistinct pool of darkness. The camera then pans left to reveal the figures casting these shadows. As the streetwalker struggles against her bonds, the grim Mirakle raises a knife to her arm. "You're stubborn! Hush!" he shouts at her, angered when her writhing makes his work more difficult. "If you only last one more minute, then we shall see," he continues, more to himself than to her. "We shall know if you are to be" his voice rises to a demonic crescendo, "the bride of science!" At this she utters a hysterical scream of pain.

The camera now tracks back and left to reveal a table covered with glass vials and bubbling beakers. While the girl hangs on the rack and sobs frantically in the background, Mirakle takes his fresh blood sample (brutally extracted from her arm) to the table and prepares a slide. Looking through the microscope, he utters a moan of despair. Suddenly, he knocks the instrument aside. "Rotten blood!" he shouts furiously, smashing equipment with another violent sweep of his arm. "You" he accuses, turning to the now-unconscious girl. Approaching her, he holds up his fist and stares into her unmoving face. "Your blood is rotten! Black as your sins! You cheated me. Your beauty was a lie!" The girl moves once and then goes limp. Mirakle feels her pulse. "Dead," he says softly, all the fury drained from him. "You are — you're dead." He swallows hard and a look of sorrow plays across his face. A quick cut shows a low-angle close-up of the girl's head hanging down in the pose of a crucified martyr. The camera switches back to Mirakle who falls to his knees and clasps his hands together, raising them in a gesture of supplication, even prayer. In a moment his head drops and he sinks down in sorrow at the feet of his victim. A medium long shot now takes in the whole scene as we see him rise wearily to his feet. Motioning to his servant, he tells Janos to "get rid of it, get it away," the coldness in his voice indicating that his grieving has ended. In close up, Janos uses a hatchet to cut each of the ropes holding up the corpse, finishing with the bottom bonds so that we see only the corpse's legs. Then Mirakle's legs step into the frame and a quick movement of his foot releases the trap door over which the girl stood. Her body falls through it, passing quickly before our limited line of sight. "Will my search never end?" asks Mirakle, despair-

Release Date: February 21, 1932
Running Time: 62 minutes
Director: Robert Florey
Producer: Carl Laemmle, Jr.
Associate Producer: E.M. Asher
Screenplay: Tom Reed, Dale Van Every
Adaptation: Robert Flores
Added Dialogue: John Huston
Scenario Editor: Richard Schayer
"Based on the immortal classic
by Edgar Allan Poe"

Photography: Karl Freund
Art Director: Charles D. Hall
Editor: Milton Carruth
Supervising Editor: Maurice Pivar
Special Effects: John Fulton
Recording Supervisor: C. Roy Hunter

Cast:
Sidney Fox Mile. Camille L'Esparay
Bela Lugosi Doctor Mirakle
Leon Waycoff Pierre Dupin
Berl Roach Paul
Betsy Ross Clarke Mme. L'Esparay
Brandon Hurst Prefect of Police
D'Arcy Corrigan Morgue Keeper
Noble Johnson Janos, The Black One
Arlene Francis Woman of the Streets



ingly.

This sequence's brutal intensity stems from Arlene Francis' terrified whimpers and screams and from Lugosi's manic performance, while Florey's choice of shots and use of close-ups perfectly complements his actors. At the beginning, Lugosi's words and tones ring with a mad malevolence. Next he becomes impatient with her whimpering, then flies into a rage when he feels she has "cheated" him. Finally, he expresses genuine remorse (no doubt tinged with more than a little disappointment) when the girl succumbs to his "experiment." At the end, the cold, callous "disposal" of the body and his telling "Will my search never end?" brings Lugosi full circle back to his zealous insanity.

Assets

For their third horror production, Universal chose to follow the now-established (and lucrative) pattern of adapting the classic works of nineteenth century horror authors. Bram Stoker's *Dracula*, Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*, and now Edgar Allan Poe's *Murders In The Rue Morgue* were brought to the screen to "thrill... shock... and even horrify" (in the words of Edward Van Sloan). Horror was here to stay, and, tossing aside the promotional caution they showed on *Dracula* the previous year, Universal was ready to shout it to the theater rafters. "Only Poe dared imagine it! Only people who can stand excitement and shock should dare to see it!" warned the film's titillating trailer. In point of fact, it was Florey who "dared imagine it." The writer/director, with help from a variety of scenario writers, took Poe's admittedly gruesome detective story (arguably the first in that particular genre, by the way) and turned it into a horrific, full-blooded Gothic study of a mad scientist's perversity.

While Florey did an admirable job on *Murders In The Rue Morgue*, the director has taken a critical pounding over the years. Critics point at the camera-mounted-on-a-swing sequence and shout phrases like "look-at-me precociousness" (*Universal Horrors*, Brunas, Brunas, and Weaver). Aside from this one (admittedly regrettable) excess, Florey made excellent visual decisions. (The one valid criticism against Florey — and this is a great one — is that he did not properly direct his actors.) For instance, Florey deftly handles the pivotal unveiling of Erik the ape: Mirakle's servant reaches for

the curtain covering the cage. As he draws it back, the viewpoint shifts and we see the curtain open not from outside looking in, but from inside looking out. All we glimpse of the dreaded creature is an indistinct shoulder and one side of the hirsute head as we look through the bars and watch audience members jump and shriek. We are placed in Erik's position and feel what it's like to be stared at and feared while simultaneously we experience that very fear ourselves as we strain to see the object of horror with which we share the cage. Unfortunately, this disorienting jolt and moment of suspense is quickly dispelled when the next shot reveals in closeup the face of an orangutan.

Of Lugosi, Robert Florey said: "It was at times difficult to control his tendency to chew the scenery." That is exactly what Lugosi does and what makes this performance so enjoyable to watch. While capable of subtlety, he generally heads in the opposite direction. In so doing, he often transforms overacting into an art form. While he chews, Lugosi puts his entire being into his jaw muscles and swallows with the deepest conviction. This sincerity makes his pregnant pauses, untwisted accent, and fascinatingly improbable facial expressions real. Obviously, Lugosi believes it and, as a result, so do we. In *Murders In The Rue Morgue*, he gives a florid but forceful performance as the mad medico driven by his horrendous, perverse dream. His wicked smiles and exaggerated eyebrow movements lack subtlety but not efficacy. No one can smile more evilly than Lugosi, and he acts at full power here. When Mirakle encounters the hysterical prostitute, Lugosi's eyes are wide and gleaming and his lips curl upwards in a grotesque half-smile. "A lady — in distress?" he asks, his pregnant pause and grotesque gleam promising a distress far greater than her present predicament.

Lugosi's intensity reveals itself at the very beginning when he delivers his evolution "pitch" at the carnival tent. "Do they still burn men for heresy?" he asks when his audience balks at his radical ideas. "Then burn me, Monsieur. Light the fire." While on the surface Lugosi's tone is friendly and his smile inviting, something unhealthy and dangerous lurks beneath. "Do you think your little candle," he begins good-naturedly when suddenly his brows descend angrily and his voice hardens as he finishes — will outshine the flame of truth?!" That which

only simmered now boils: "My life is consecrated to great experiment." In close-up his eyes gleam, and as he forces the words from his lips we can see in his face the disdain of a giant for mere mortals who dare doubt the speaker's greatness. Lugosi, having established his power and presence, now lets his character's madness shine through. "I tell you I will prove — your kinship — with the ape." His drawing out of the word "prove" and insertion of pregnant pauses emphasize his conviction. At the same time, his voice takes on an almost desperate intensity as he raises the volume a notch, exposing the twisted roots of madness.

In addition to Robert Florey and Bela Lugosi, the third great star of *Murders In The Rue Morgue* is cinematographer Karl Freund. Due to Florey's direction and Freund's camera work and lighting, the film possesses a visual richness far above its lurid story, inane dialogue, and melodramatic acting. Freund makes good use of low-key lighting to create mood. In the important introduction to Dr. Mirakle, the lighting casts a giant shadow behind Mirakle as he moves and gestures dramatically on the stage, emphasizing the man's presence and power.

Under Florey's direction, Freund carefully constructs his images with an eye towards depth and balance. In the opening sequence in Mirakle's tent, Freund places two tent posts in the foreground to add visual depth. He carefully avoids arranging people and objects across a horizontal line, and instead staggers their positions to place some in the foreground, thereby creating a three-dimensional feel. The visuals are carefully composed, and Freund imbues these compositions with meaning. Erik's cage in the upper left hand corner of the frame is balanced by an oil lamp placed in the lower right, creating a diagonal sight line. Through the middle of the frame runs the horizontal flight of four stairs up to the raised stage where Mirakle stands, balanced in the center of the horizontal line. When he moves to the side, the balance shifts and the now-unbalanced composition suddenly becomes a metaphor for Mirakle's unbalanced mind.

Camera movement plays a critical role in *Murders In The Rue Morgue*, creating mood and intensity. When Mirakle speaks of his "great experiment," for example, the camera tracks in so that Lugosi's face fills nearly the entire screen, inexorably drawing the viewer toward this visage until it becomes the whole world. Then, lighting from the side turns half his face into a mass of moving shadows as he speaks, while we are drawn to Lugosi's one visible eye, which shines with an insane gleam. The gradual, commanding camera movement, the pinpoint lighting, and Lugosi's malevolent presence all combine to create a moment of intensity.

Charles D. Hall's Gothic sets and expressionistic backgrounds (the bizarre angles and painted shadows are reminiscent of 1919's *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari*) evoke a dark, malevolent, almost surrealistic atmosphere. Mirakle's secret laboratory is a combination fifteenth century alchemic chamber and inquisition dungeon. Blank stone walls enclose a room filled with oversized tables and heavy wooden benches. Glass tubes, odd instruments, and jars of archaic origin litter their surfaces. In the center rises a wooden platform enclosed by a rough-hewn railing. A huge, upright, wooden cross in the shape of an X dominates the dias — a device to which the madman straps his victims in a crucifixion pose and subjects them to his diabolical "great experiment." The macabre settings perfectly match the unwholesome characters and dire events.

Even the more mundane sets are treated with careful consideration and detailed art direction. Pierre's flat, for instance, with its exposed pipes, oversized rooftop window, and crude furniture, is cluttered with books and drawings while the walls sport student sketches and even charcoal caricatures drawn right on the plaster. These minor touches add visual interest, but, more importantly, they enhance the believability of the settings and so aid the viewer in suspending his disbelief over events that often prove highly unbelievable.

Liabilities

Apart from Lugosi, the remaining principals act

(continued)



as if they are in a stage-bound melodrama (or, in the case of Bert Roach, in a burlesque comedy). As Pierre, Leon Waycoff (later Leon Ames) gives an overblown, unconvincing performance. When his character becomes excited or angry, his exaggerated voice and gestures ring with insincerity (as if by overplaying he can make up for his lack of real conviction). Even in his calmer sequences, Waycoff displays no sense of subtlety. When Pierre pays his nighttime visit to Dr. Mirakle, the doctor tells him there will be "no show tonight, young man," Pierre replies, "I've already seen your performance — doctor." During the overlong, "dramatic" pause before "doctor," Waycoff reaches up to touch his throat and swivel his neck about, as his character supposedly remembers Erik grabbing him by the throat during the carnival. This gross theatrical trick is more suited to provincial theater than sinister cinema. Lugosi is able to pull something like this off, but Waycoff lacks the presence and conviction to make it work. (Florey's direction of actors didn't seem to improve with time. For instance, the director's final horror film, *The Beast With Five Fingers* (1946), is nearly sunk by the toneless, insipid acting of its "world-weary" hero, Robert Alda.)

Sidney Fox has little appeal in the role of Camille. Why Pierre or Mirakle (or even Erik, for that matter) would be so captivated by this silly, colorless creature is a mystery. Of course, Mirakle primarily wanted her for her blood (though the Good Doctor seemed to develop a more "natural" secondary desire as well), but as for the other two, one can only conclude that they loved her because it was in the script. Said script gives her little to do (fawning over a new hat, singing a little ditty, or occasionally uttering a scream before fainting), and this may be just as well. Still, other actresses such as Fay Wray, Gloria Stuart, and Frances Drake were able to take similar wallflower characters and infuse them with life. Not so Sidney, whose alternately silly and near-invisible presence inspires no confidence in the unlikely proceedings. One suspects that her reported romantic relationship with producer Carl Laemmle, Jr. may have had something to do with her winning the part (and receiving top billing).

As with many horror pictures of the Golden Age, the overblown romance becomes a stone around the film's neck. The love scenes between Pierre and Camille are ridiculous in their corny, antiquated dialogue. "You're like a flower," declares Pierre, gazing into Camille's moon-eyes, "soft and fragrant, pure and beautiful. You're like a star too — a white morning star. And your hair, it's full of stardust." Wait, he's not through yet: "You're like a song the girls of Provence sing on Mayday, and like the dancing in Normandy on Mayday, and like the wine in

Burgundy on Mayday. Oh, Camille, I love you." Enough already! Equally excessive and ridiculous, the introduction to the lovers' "playful" scene in the park treats us to no fewer than seven pairs of young lovers engaged in romantic byplay before we finally find our hero and heroine (on the dreaded swing).

If the picture's love-interest comes off as a stone weight, then the "comedy" becomes a veritable albatross draped about the film's neck. As the whiny, cowardly Paul, Pierre's roommate and sidekick, Bert Roach's mincing portrayal of this silly, frivolous sissy is about as unfunny a comedy bit as one can find. Whenever Roach is on-screen, the picture comes to a screeching halt. The second wave of comedy relief comes in the form of the three "witnesses" who claim to have heard the assailant in Camille's flat speaking in a foreign language. First, the German bystander swears it was Italian. The second, witness, an Italian, says no, it was Danish. Finally, the third bystander, a Dane, steps forward and claims, "It

Sidney Fox has little appeal in the role of Camille. Why Pierre or Mirakle (or even Erik, for that matter) would be so captivated by this silly, colorless creature is a mystery.

was German." This sets them all off. "Italian!" shouts the German; "Danish!" yells the Italian; "German!" roars the Dane. Then all three bellow at each other in their respective tongues. This noisy, nonsensical "comedy" lasts a full twenty seconds until a gendarme has the sense to shout "silence!" Before we can breathe a sign of relief, however, the three get in a few more licks. This sequence goes on and on and on, beyond silliness, almost (but not quite) to the point of slapstick.

The picture's credibility strains to the breaking point when shots of the gorilla-suited actor playing Erik are intercut with closeups of a real chimp. These horribly mismatched shots are made even more ludicrous by the photography (a rare error in judgement on the part of Florey and Freund). The live monkey closeups invariably feature a soft focus which contrasts markedly with the more natural hard focus of the medium and long shots of the gorilla suit. These jarring differences in cinematic texture within the same sequence only draw attention to the unconvincing cheat. In 1932, however, audience (and critical) expectations were apparently

much lower than they are today, as *Variety* noted that "several switches from the real gorilla to a costume double are neatly veiled."

Further gorilla problems arise when Dr. Mirakle "talks" with the ape. "I have learned his language," boasts Mirakle to his audience. Smiling benevolently, he approaches Erik's cage and begins speaking softly in some unknown language.*** Between Mirakle's phrases, the monkey makes high-pitched whining and cooing noises, sounding nothing like the "language" Mirakle professes to know. This silly monkey baby-talk puts Mirakle in a ridiculous light. (Apparently, Erik understands English as well, for Mirakle eschews the gorilla tongue and speaks to the ape in English for the rest of the film.) The simian's "dialogue" doesn't help matters either. "I will translate what he says," announces Mirakle. "My home is in the African jungle, where I live with my father and my mother — my brothers and sisters. But I was captured by a band of hairless white apes and carried away to a strange land. I'm in the prime of my strength — and I'm lonely." To his credit, Lugosi invests just as much heartfelt sincerity in this silly soliloquy as he does in his "great experiment" speech, but here the dialogue only makes Mirakle look ridiculous.

Despite these liabilities, *Murders In The Rue Morgue* deserves better than the critical knocks it has received in recent reassessments (*Universal Horrors* labelling it a "hokey, outdated stiff," for instance). Negative appraisals like these may be (a) a backlash against Robert Taves' recent Florey biography in which Taves more or less defies the director; and (b) the expectation that since *Rue Morgue* is a Universal product, it should be better. While not on the same level as *The Mummy* or *The Black Cat*, *Murders In The Rue Morgue* still merits the respect it isn't getting. Florey's effective direction, Freund's fluid visuals, Hall's Caligaresque sets, and Lugosi's archetypal performance (setting the standard for his many subsequent Mad Doctor roles — and those of his imitators) make *Murders In The Rue Morgue* an unusual, artistic, and entertaining entry in the Golden Age of Horror.

Review

"*Dracula* and *Frankenstein* having softened 'em up," predicted *Variety*'s Bige (February 16, 1932), "this third of U's [Universal's] baby-scaring cycle won't have the benefit of shocking them stiff and then making them talk about it. Had it come first there's no doubt it would have created a stronger impression. But it thrills sufficiently in its hokey, gruesome way.... At the Mayfair [theater] a cynical audience hooted the finale hokum, but away from Broadway the chase and its finish shouldn't meet such hard-boiled resistance. The clever staging makes it seem not too phoney."

Of Lugosi, Bige states, "Dr. Mirakle [is] played in Bela Lugosi's customary fantastic manner," then complains that "Sidney Fox overdraws the sweet ingenuite to the point of nearly distracting an audience from any fear it might have for her."

Production Notes

Murders In The Rue Morgue was director Robert Florey's "consolation prize" after *Frankenstein* was stolen away from him by James Whale. While Florey worked on *Frankenstein* (preparing the script and shooting test reels), Universal considered newcomer Bette Davis for the part of Elizabeth. When the studio bumped Florey from the project, Ms. Davis went with the director to his new production assignment of *Murders In The Rue Morgue*. Producer Carl Laemmle, Jr., however, was unimpressed by her screen test and Sidney Fox eventually received the female lead.

Despite a huge success with *Dracula*, the summer of 1931 was a disastrous time financially for Universal, which drew a gigantic deficit for the quarter. In September, E. M. Asher, a supervisor at Universal, ordered that the upcoming *Murders In The Rue Morgue* production be changed from its period setting of 1845 to modern day 1931 in order to economize on costumes and sets. Fortunately, calmer heads prevailed and the film remained a period piece. Even so, the budget was cut from a proposed \$130,000 to a mere \$90,000, which caused director Robert Florey to walk out on the

project. He soon returned, however, and the film ultimately sported a more respectable budget of \$164,200 (which was still over \$125,000 short of *Frankenstein's* final cost). After principal photography was completed, seven days of retakes and additional shooting bumped *Murders In The Rue Morgue's* final price tag up to \$190,099.45.

Florey recalled the production in *The Films of Bela Lugosi*, by Richard Bojarski: "I wrote the *Rue Morgue* adaptation in a week and directed the film in four. That was during the fall of 1931.... In *Rue Morgue* I used the same device I employed in my *Frankenstein* adaptation. Bela Lugosi became Dr. Mirakle — a mad scientist destitute of creating a human being — not with body parts stolen from a graveyard and a brain from a lab, but by the mating of an ape with a woman." (Note: This "mating" was toned down to become a mere mixing of blood in the film's final screenplay, which remembered that Lugosi "was habitually silent and not given to conversation. Between scenes he retired in his dressing room.")

The project was originally to have been directed by George Melford, who had previously helmed the cinematically superior Spanish language version of *Dracula* for Universal. But just as Whale bumped Florey from *Frankenstein*, so Florey bumped Melford from *Murders In The Rue Morgue*.

John Huston, at the time under contract to Universal as a writer, provided "additional dialogue." In his autobiography, *An Open Book*, Huston recalled, "I tried to bring Poe's prose style into the dialogue, but the director thought it sounded stilted, so he and his assistant rewrote scenes on the set. As a result, the picture was an odd mixture of nineteenth-century grammarian's prose and modern colloquialisms."

The picture suffered from some last-minute tampering in the editing room. Originally, it was to open with the scene of the streetfight and Mirakle taking the prostitute to his laboratory. This sequence (the strongest in the film) was deemed too downbeat an

opening and so was shuffled with the more breezy carnival scenes. Unfortunately, this rearrangement weakens the dramatic structure of the story. In the originally structure, Mirakle's (and Erik's) unhealthy attraction to Camille at the carnival takes on a much darker, more sinister meaning and we can clearly see the contrast in Mirakle's mind between the "tainted" streetwalker and the "pure" Camille. This juxtaposition is lost in the current ordering. The scene switching also creates some continuity problems. Mirakle rides with Erik to Camille's residence, whereupon he gets out and the coach (with Erik inside) drives on. The next we see of Mirakle, he is back in the coach and Erik is nowhere to be seen. Besides that, a perfectly calm and clear night has inexplicably become a foggy and windy one.

Two other, minor gaffes have nothing to do with scene switching, however. The first comes when the streetwalker's body arrives at the morgue. When the attendant asks for identification, the orderly responds with, "None, she was naked." When Mirakle dropped her body through his trap door into the river, however, she was clothed in a smock. The other discrepancy is one of historical accuracy. In one street scene, a man rides an old-time bicycle, the style of which was not seen until several decades later.

Lugosi's on-screen victim is Arlene Francis, making her screen debut. Hero Leon Ames also made his film debut here using his real name of Leon Waycoff. The actor didn't acquire his stage moniker until 1935. Ames held a low opinion of his first picture, later calling it (in *Famous Monsters of Filmland*) "a perfectly awful film which still pops up on TV to haunt me!"

Statuesque black actor Noble Johnson (*The Most Dangerous Game*; *The Mummy*; *King Kong*) plays Mirakle's sadistic servant, Janos, in whiteface — despite begin referred to as "The Black One" in the film's credits.

Poe's grotesque detective story was first adapted for film in 1908 as a Sherlock Holmes vehicle:

Sherlock Holmes In The Great Murder Mystery (Denmark). The Raven (1912) also utilized elements of "Murders in the Rue Morgue" (among numerous other of Poe's stories). The original title finally reached the screen in 1914 as a Sol Rosenberg production. After the 1932 film, Warner Bros. tackled the tale in 1954 as *Phantom Of The Rue Morgue*, though their adaptation starring Karl Malden as a mad zoologist was no closer to Poe's story than Universal's. *Phantom* is unusual for two reasons. First, it is the only 3-D adaptation of a Poe story to date. Second, the ape suit in *Phantom* was worn by Charles Gamora, who, 22 years earlier, had played Erik in Universal's picture. (Charles Gamora was not the only monkey-man in *Murders In The Rue Morgue*. Stuntman Joe Bonomo donned the hairsuit disguise for the film's more vigorous sequences. Bonomo went on to portray not one but two of the manimal creatures stalking the *Island Of Lost Souls* the following year.) In 1971, AIP's *Murders In The Rue Morgue* strayed even further from Poe than any of the previous adaptations by presenting a plot revolving around a killer who stalks a Grand Guignol theater presenting Poe's *Murders in the Rue Morgue* on stage. Finally, in 1986, Poe's tale made it to the screen in a faithful adaptation. Unfortunately, it was only the small screen, for *The Murders In The Rue Morgue* was made-for-television movie (though with the advantage of having George C. Scott in the role of Poe's deductive detective, C. Auguste Dupin).

(*In the on-screen preface to *Frankenstein* (1931).

**This camera mounted on a swing gimmick was possibly suggested by cinematographer Karl Freund, who had used a similar technique in the 1925 German silent film *Variety*.

***This language is not Lugosi's native Hungarian, but (according to two Hungarian acquaintances of mine) it does sound something like Romanian, a language the actor may have had some knowledge of.) ■

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- X THE UNKNOWN! (Early Hammer Horror)
- HORRORS OF THE BLACK MUSEUM! (Outstanding!)
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RAY DENNIS STECKLER: TAKE TWO

By James Elliot Singer

A "director's cut" of a movie is a film containing alternate or excised footage never before seen in its original theatrical release. Generally this footage is removed by a producer—usually for length or pace, or by the dictates of the ratings board if it is a matter of objectionable content.

Over the past year, Ray Dennis Steckler has created his versions of a director's cut. Steckler and company have taken nine of his movies, re-cutting, re-naming, letterboxing, de-colorizing and considerably trimming them. He's also added slo-mo and freeze frame video effects to some films and inserted completely new shots into several of them.

Since Steckler created these films in the first place, it can't be called tampering. He now feels that these new alternate versions, dubbed the "Steckler Collection," come closer to his original personal vision of how he wanted them to unreel in movie houses. These maverick director's cuts now run approximately 60 minutes each. If they were originally shot in color, they're now available in color or B&W version. Of course, the original movie versions are still being released and sold as before.

Since I'm the type of person who has to be marched at gunpoint to see the latest Hollywood McBlockbuster, I spent a weekend this past summer screening a Steckler-a-thon of these new videos as well as their first video incarnations. I'm nowhere near the completist that Tim Lucas of Video Watchdog is, so I avoided any analytical comparisons that required a clipboard, stopwatch, and twin TVs and VCRs. That I leave to the more studious scholars out there, if they have the guts.

Probably the biggest surprise was seeing his most well-known, most popular midnight movie *The Incredibly Strange Creatures Who Stopped Living and Became Mixed-Up Zombies*, originally shot in radioactive pop-colors, in a new trimmed B&W version called *Teenage Psycho*, a shortening of the film's alternative live spookshow title in the sixties and seventies, *Teenage Psycho Meets Bloody Mary*.

For the record, the re-titlings are as follows: *Wild Ones On Wheels* is now *Desert Maniacs*; *Rat Pfunk A Boo Boo* is *Rock and Roll Superheroes*; *The Thrill Killers* or *The Maniacs Are Loose* has become *Mad Dog Click*; *Body Fever* or *Super Cool* is now known as *Deadlocked*; *Blood Shack*, originally titled and also released as *The Chopper* is back to *Blood Shack* again; *Sinthia, the Devil's Doll* is now *Teenage She-Devil*; *The Hollywood Strangler Meets the Skid Row Slasher* remains the same but its follow-up, *The Las Vegas Serial Killer* is now *The Hollywood Strangler in Las Vegas*. Whew! Got it? In any event, after a heavy dosage of Steckler movies in a concentrated span of time, I found myself having weird hallucinogenic hypnotic dreams, awakening in a cold sweat in the middle of the night several times.

Herein we present our semi-sequel to Ray's first *Cult Movies* interview, published in issue #8, and also get a chance to learn a bit more about Steckler's *Scream of the Butterfly*, a very rare adult movie recently unearthed by cultic archivist Johnny Legend; and one of my own favorites, the bizarrely delirious *Sinthia, the Devil's Doll*. We interviewed Steckler at his Mascot Video office in Las Vegas. This is an all new interview, not a re-dubbed or re-edited, previously published interview with inserted extra questions and alternate answers.



Ray Dennis Steckler in *The Thrill Killers*.

Cult Movies: Tell us about your appearance for English television last week in Los Angeles.

Ray Dennis Steckler: That was for the BBC, a 10-hour miniseries on films and filmmakers.

CM: This would be Clive Barker's *A-Z of Horror*?

RDS: You've got it. It'll feature Roger Corman, Joe Dante and so on. The producers were more concerned with my live shows in the sixties and early seventies, when we did the "Teenage Psycho Meets Bloody Mary" show, and "The Maniacs Are Loose!" Actually most of the discussion was about "The Lemon Grove Kids Meet The Monsters" because that was the live show that was done specifically for matinees, for the little kids. I talked mostly about that show, my all time favorite.

CM: Are you providing film clips for the BBC to use?

RDS: Yes, I gave them footage from *The Lemon Grove Kids* with thunder and lightning and the mummy and all that stuff. The first, *Teenage Psycho*, really only had thunder and lightning added to it, and then *The Maniacs Are Loose!* had footage of the hypnotist, if you recall. [A 6.5 minute color prologue featuring The Amazing Ormond and his swirling Hypno-disc with Steckler's less-than-comforting Mad Dog Click face superimposed over it. -CM]. For *Lemon Grove Kids* we shot three minutes of footage of Gopher being chased by the mummy.



Steckler today.

the mummy chasing Carolyn Brandt, interspersed with thunder and lightning and all of that. Those three minutes were just tailor made. By that time, our third live show, we learned how to do it just right for a matinee.

CM: Hopefully this series will turn up on American television one day.

RDS: It's coming, I believe, on the A&E channel. I don't know yet when my segment appears.

CM: And the BBC crew needed only one day of your time.

RDS: One day. Wouldn't want to ruin the image, you know. When you shoot with me, you shoot quick.

CM: The British are still more interested in American cult movies than we Americans.

RDS: Well, they are with me. They're still giving me exposure that I've yet to get here, with the exception of the magazines such as *Cult Movies*, *Filmfax*, and *Fangoria*. They've done great articles but I haven't done anything with American television yet.

CM: Where you filmed in Los Angeles?

RDS: The Aero Theater on Santa Monica Blvd.

CM: Let's go back and talk about *Thrill Killers/The Maniacs Are Loose!* (1964). How did Liz Renay get cast into that movie?

RDS: I saw Liz Renay in *A Date With Death* with Gerald Mohr, one of my favorite actors, and I liked what she did in that movie. Joe "Brick" Bardo, who worked with me, said that he could get hold of her, that she was getting out of prison. I told Joe, "Contact her and bring her to the set." I don't think she was out of prison for more than a day when we started shooting with her. I had never met Liz Renay [Glamour girl and girlfriend of mobster Mickey Cohen - CM]. She was a lot of fun to work with. It was like Perils of Pauline, with her running up and down the mountain in her high heels. No complaints. She was a gem. Just a gem. Fun, fun.

CM: After *Thrill Killers*, you became DP on a picture called *Scream of the Butterfly* (1965) starring Nelida Lobato.

RDS: That was shot here in Las Vegas. Friends of mine who did the choreography for *Creatures*, Bill Turner and Alan Smith, put the deal together. Alan Smith wrote the screenplay and they both played parts in the movie. The director was Eber Lobato; he was from Argentina and he was married to Nelida who was starring at the Thunderbird, a now-gone Las Vegas casino-resort.

CM: A hot little number. She was a showgirl?

RDS: She had come from the Lido deParis to work in the Thunderbird show. I can't recall the name of that show. Bill and Alan raised the money and they asked me to photograph the movie because the director, Eber Lobato, had never directed a movie. He knew how to stage things but he didn't know how to edit or set up master shots. If you look at the movie, almost every shot is around 30 seconds. What he did was shoot a few lines, stop, go to the next angle, stop, shoot a few more lines, stop, and so on. But we did get the picture finished.

CM: You shot the entire film?

RDS: I shot 90 percent of it. The scenes in the district attorney's office were added later. Howard Veit, a very bright guy, added those scenes to give the film a little more length and more exposition. [The credits on the *Something Weird Video* film print list producer Veit as the creator of this pace-killing, static footage. -CM] I saw *Scream* in a big theater in downtown LA



Liz Renay in *The Thrill Killers*.

when it opened. I holds up today, doesn't it?
CM: Actually it's a little gem of an adults-only film. It's got some pretty daring themes in it, for its time.

RDS: I thought that the scenes with Nic Novarro and Nelida at Lake Mead were some of the sexiest scenes I've ever done. Within, shall we say, good taste or whatever. It was just beautiful the way it was placed in the film. I was very happy about it. I was standing in the water with a hand-held camera shooting most of that. Everybody in that movie was fun to work with. Leona Gage was in it; she used to be Miss Universe. I believe she lost her title because they found out she was married. She had a small part and she was just gorgeous. First time I had ever shot anything in Las Vegas and that's what made me feel that I could come here and make a living.

CM: Do you recall how long the shooting schedule was?

RDS: Two weeks.

CM: I've yet to see Eber Lobata's name on anything else.

RDS: Nelida returned to star in the Lido for quite a few years and then I don't know what happened to her. No one I know has ever heard from either of them since.

CM: A one-shot director.

RDS: Obviously he could never make another deal or put another movie together, to my knowledge. I'm not even sure if they stayed together.

CM: And now the film is out on the SWV label.

RDS: Johnny Legend called me and said he found a print.

CM: Tell us a bit about *Sinithia, the Devil's Doll* from 1968.

RDS: *Sinithia* was produced by Dorothy Sonney out of Texas and she came to me to make a movie, "something weird," but with more nudity than I had ever shot before. I got together with Herb Robins and we wrote a treatment that she liked. The girl who played the lead, Shula Roan, came into my office with Ted Roter. She was a Sunday school teacher. I had been trying for three or four weeks to find someone to play the lead. The minute she walked in I said... she's perfect! There was something special about her. She was a delight. I don't think she ever did anything else but that one movie. It was a one-shot thing. I kinda like that, when I cast people and they don't do any other movies. It makes the movie, as it goes through the years, one-of-a-kind. I

felt she should have gone further, but I don't know what happened to her.

CM: Playboy model Diane Webber, also known as Marguerite Empey was in it too.

RDS: Diane Webber was in there. I had always wanted to use her after seeing her in John Lamb's *Mermaids of Tiburon* in 1962. I always thought she was great. She was fun to work with. No problems at all. It was a great cast; Brett Zeller, who was in my picture *Body Fever*, played the fortune teller. She's a good actress. She went on to do some leads in a few movies. She worked for Ted Mikels. [In Mikels' entertaining *Doll Squad* (1973), Brett Zeller's character Sherrise is shot by Herb Robins during the first reel.-**CM**] She was an artist and did all the paintings for *Body Fever* and *Sinithia*. Every time you saw a painting on the wall, that was Brett's. A good artist.

CM: And now you've re-cut your movies into new video versions.

RDS: I re-edited them pretty much the way I wanted them to originally look, without any padding. I've re-released them as the "Steckler Collection" and I've gotten a tremendous response. A lot of people who've never seen the original films are ordering the new ones first.

(continued)

Now they're tighter, trimmer and they move faster. As I said, I've also de-colored them.

CM: You've re-cut *Synthia* as *Teenage She-Devil*.

RDS: I've always felt that *Synthia* should have been made in B&W. There's a look about that format that gives a film a little more style and taste. But back then they wanted color. Everybody wanted color.

CM: Whereas older films are now colorized, you've done the reverse and trimmed and re-released your color movies in B&W, besides trimming down your B&W films such as *Wild Ones On Wheels*.

RDS: If I had made all my films in B&W, even *Creatures*, I would have been very happy at the time. If I could, I would have preferred to shoot all my films in 35mm B&W rather than 16mm color. But — because we had to go color, we shot in 16mm and blew it up to 35mm. Shooting in 16mm was much more mobile, without all that heavy equipment. It saved a lot of time and money, when we didn't have both.

CM: But grainier.

RDS: Actually Ektachrome Commercial was beautiful film. Even Walt Disney, on the *Wonderful World of Color* show, was using ECO film. It was the best film ever put out. Slow speed, but just gorgeous.

CM: So *The Incredibly Strange Creatures* is now *Teenage Psycho*. What changes were made to that?

RDS: Again, I tightened it up to where I felt it wasn't a padded movie anymore. Now when you watch it, it's over before you know it. We trimmed everywhere. We did it once and I sold two hundred copies. Then I felt we could do even better. And that new one is also going out in B&W. It's 90% the way I originally envisioned the picture. I'm happy with it. I have to tell you that my movies call for de-colorization. There's something about them that belongs in a B&W world. *Teenage Psycho* is a more intriguing movie in B&W. It now fits into that B&W world of the '30s and '40s.

CM: I'm so used to Lazlo Kovacs' blazing color.

RDS: [Vilmos] Zsigmond, Kovacs and [Joel] Mascalci, they were great. They created color saturations never before seen. They were European cinematographers and weren't studio-bound. Their lighting didn't have to be three-dimensional, back-lit and all.

CM: They were probably shooting at ASA 50.

RDS: Oh no, they were shooting at ASA 16. That was ECO. Outdoors, 16. Indoors, probably ASA 25. You'll find that my color pictures now in B&W have a flavor added to them. I've also put together several documentary videos including my speaking engagement at the York Theater retrospective in San Francisco in '88 with added footage from my films. Carolyn Brandt also has her own video. That was made in response to requests from her many fans and it happens to be my best seller; *Carolyn Brandt, Queen of Cult*.

CM: You shot some footage for Doris Wishman for *Deadly Weapons*.

RDS: Doris came to Vegas and asked me to do some second unit work around town with an actress-model. I'm not sure if she doubled for Chesty or what.

CM: It would be kind of hard to find someone to double for Chesty, with her 73 inch hooters!

RDS: I've never seen the film.

CM: And Doris Wishman?

RDS: Doris was fun to work with. One-take Doris. She knew exactly what she wanted. She was great. A delightful experience and I'm sorry we never got together again.

HOMICIDAL MANIACS ON A BLOODY RAMPAGE



THE CASH STARRING FLAGG LIZ RENAVY THRILL KILLERS

CM: She's said that Chesty Morgan was a little tough to work with.

RDS: Who isn't? [laughs]. You want me to name them all through my life?

CM: Let's talk about *The Hollywood Strangler Meets the Skid Row Slasher* made in 1979. Was it ever shown in any theaters?

RDS: No. We blew it up to 35mm but we never put it out. I could never create any theatrical interest.

CM: How did that film come about?

RDS: I just wanted to make an unusual, silent film. An experiment. I wanted to make a picture about two psychos and the fascination that one had for the other. Have you ever thought about a film featuring a serial killer

walking onto the scene where another killer is at work and wondering what the reaction and result would be?

CM: Well, I'm used to seeing Frankenstein meeting Dracula.

RDS: So I started weaving it together. It was a fun movie to make with no dialogue. No lines, no theatrical-type performances to be concerned about. It went along quickly. Some of it was shot on the streets of Las Vegas, if you didn't notice that already, like the Flick Theater in downtown Vegas. Most don't know that it was Fremont Street in Vegas, cut in with Hollywood Boulevard. It's cut in well, cutting from Hollywood and Western to the Flick 10 times in the movie. But then Hollywood Boulevard and Fremont Street — is there really any difference?

CM: No, not back in 1979.

RDS: [laughs] I mean we went from the bad part of Hollywood to the bad part of Vegas. That condition still exists today in both cities.

CM: How did you find the actresses that Pierre Agostini strangled — I mean in the movie?

RDS: Except for two, all the girls were out of Hollywood. They just answered ads in the trade papers.

CM: They seemed to be more nudie-model types than actresses.

RDS: I didn't expect to cast any actresses because of the nudity involved. It was easier to get models to play the parts than actresses. They were all fine. I thought that some of them were very attractive.

And then we did the sequel, that was *The Las Vegas Serial Killer*. Now it's been re-released on video as *The Hollywood Strangler in Las Vegas*. We've de-colored it; did you know that?

CM: I do now. In the first *Strangler* film, Carolyn Brandt, for the first time, has a genuinely scary look about her, unlike her other films.

RDS: Well, what we planned was that Carolyn would start out the movie wearing terrible clothes; drab, almost prison-like clothes and that she would wear absolutely no make-up. As the picture progressed, after she kills someone, she gets a little more color to her face and a little better wardrobe. We give the feeling that she was some kind of vampire coming to life. You'll notice that by the end of the picture she looks very good.

CM: Feeding off her victims, in perversely spiritual or emotional ways.

RDS: Right. Very few people have caught that so I don't know if I executed it correctly or not. If you watch it a second time, you'll see the progression before she meets her demise at the hands of this guy [the Strangler] who's fascinated with her. Actually I started a third film with Pierre Agostini — that's his real name by the way — but we never got halfway. Pierre said he didn't want to die three times for me. So I have half a *Strangler* movie. Good footage too.

CM: Basically doing what he did in the first two films?

RDS: More or less. I had no idea what the ending was going to be. Now I'll never know. I may put it out one day and instead of printing "The End" at the conclusion, we'll close it with "Ran Out Of Money."

CM: How about a compilation of all your unreleased footage? Speaking of Vegas, did you ever work for the Vegas TV show [with Robert Ulrich as P. I Dan Tanna]?

RDS: No. That was the Hollywood system. I did meet a few people who worked on that show. Long live Dan Tanna. The only tana I like is the tana leaves in the old mummy mov-

ies.

CM: In the first interview you did for *Cult Movies* magazine, you talked about your three unreleased, still-to-be-edited movies. What's the status of those babies?

RDS: Status is that they're about 75% edited now. As soon as they're finished, I'll begin distributing them. I know there's a market for them, people who are new fans especially. The majority of people who buy one of my movies for the first time seem to wind up ordering every movie I've made. I've got some diehard fans out there. Someone you know just did a story about my career for his newspaper in Oklahoma and I've already gotten responses from that area of the country.

CM: John Wooley, entertainment reporter for the *Tulsa World* newspaper...

RDS: A very good writer. And a fan of mine, which I appreciate. I sent John a copy of *Deadlocked* and he said that he could never imagine this movie in color after having seen it in B&W. I just did a local radio call-in show here in town that was broadcast across the country and got some incredible feedback from callers who knew all about my films.

CM: aside from those three unfinished films, what other projects have you got planned?

RDS: I plan on shooting features directly on video. There are many qualified actors and actresses here in Las Vegas to do that. It's easier and cheaper than shooting on film. Most of the films people've shot on video have gone nowhere, even with this technique called FilmLook that costs about five grand and makes it seem as if it were shot on film.

CM: I've heard that your planning to make some documentaries on the old Hollywood cowboys.

RDS: Depending on the property rights, I plan to make a video documentary series on the B-Western actors of the thirties and the pictures they made. I want to do videos about Hoot Gibson, Ken Maynard, Tom Tyler, Rex

Bell, all stars who made low budget oaters. Sinister Cinema is releasing something like 300 public domain B-Westerns and the quality is superb. I want to give some insight into these men, most of whom the public knows nothing about today. They would make three movies a week at times, sometimes even shooting the same story three times at the same location using the same camera set-ups. In some cases, the actors would just switch parts!!! The directors must have known that shooting too much footage would have cost them their jobs. It's just wonderful to watch these little Westerns and study their production methods. It's also fascinating to me to see how that part of California looked before all the condominiums and developments and malls covered everything, blotting out the vistas.

CM: They were all one take wonders.

RDS: One take. That was it. And if they ran out of film, well, that's why some of them were 45, 48, 49 minutes.

CM: The core of so-called cult movie interest, at least on a published level, is sci-fi, fantasy, horror and now lately the adults-only films of the '60s, not the B-Westerns. Books and magazines on the mass market level are not geared to the fans of old cowboy stars.

RDS: I agree with you for the most part — that there are a lot of diehard writers out there who just stick to those categories. The problem in trying to cover the history of the old Westerns for the writers now is that there's no one left to talk to. Almost everyone connected with those films is dead. You can't get any first-hand info. So we can only get our facts second-hand from whatever's been written. Being a filmmaker I would like to dissect some of these movies through narration and clips. Because I've never done anything but low-budget films, I appreciate it when something looks good and I can understand when something's not so good. If those producers and directors

from the old days were around today, I'm sure they'd be in demand to make low-budget movies because there was no messing around with them. They just created good, tight little stories and the public never got tired of them simply because they're fun, a relief. As a fan, I could never get enough of Ken Maynard, and Kermit Maynard, his brother. He did a whole series about the Royal Canadian Mounted Police.

CM: The adult public tends to think of only two cowboy stars — Gene Autry and Roy Rogers.

RDS: That's because they went into television right away, probably because they saw the handwriting on the wall. Their theatrical peak was in the mid-forties, although let's face it, Gene was very popular in the mid-thirties. My focus will be on the great stars from the thirties. That's Hoot Gibson, Bob Steele, Buster Crabbe; from Mascot, PRC, Chesterfield, Supreme, all those great little studios.

CM: I'm sure all the studio records of those companies are long gone, destroyed...

RDS: Sure, or near impossible to find. I first saw those films on television, growing up in Reading, Pennsylvania. I think they're much more important than the films I've made.

CM: People are not going to discover them on TV today. TNT and AMC throw a few on Saturday morning. Today's kids don't grow up with cowboy stars at all.

RDS: The biggest problem you'll find with kids and any older movie is that they don't want to watch B&W. "Hey, Dad, what's wrong with the TV set?" They don't understand B&W because they're just not exposed to it. But I want to do this video series on the old-time cowboys of that era. I may change my name Cash Flagg to Tex Flagg for the series. It's not about making money. I just want to give a new audience an historical, entertaining insight into people who are just not acknowledged or remembered today at all. ■



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SLEAZE SINEMA

"Dirty Movies For Dirty Minds"

Reviewed by Todd Tjersland



Girl Gangs

Welcome to my nightmare, creep cadets! The editors here at *Cult Movies* have convinced me to write this new movie review column, diabolically dedicated to rare cinema of sex and gore. And just who am I? I am Todd Tjersland, the evil author of the best-selling new book, *Sex, Shocks & Sadism: An A-Z Guide to Erotic Horror on Videocassette* (see advertisement in this issue). With each new issue of *Cult Movies*, I intend to unearth the bloody best of erotic sleaze and horror from the top of the creep-heap, devoting equal coverage to American, Asian and European trash. Well, enough about me. If you like this column, write the editor of this mag and tell 'em I deserve a raise! Now, on with the show...

Blood Diner

(USA, 1987) Hilariously sleazy and cheesy updating of H. G. Lewis' *Blood Feast* (1964) by *The Being* director Jackie Kong. The naughty Namtut brothers run a swinging vegetarian diner where they chop up chicks for kicks and serve the lurid "left-overs" to their crazy customers. With the horrid help of their dead uncle's disembodied brain, the black-hearted bros are plotting to resurrect Sheetar, Sumerian goddess of sex and death. But first, they must build her a suitable earthly body. In true Frankensteinian fashion, they seduce and murder sluts and whores, then sew the best pieces together! Finally, a virgin is kidnapped for the midnight ritual to fill the mutilated Franken-whore with the sin-soaked spirit of their ghoul goddess! Two goofy cops bust in at the last minute, only to be confronted by flesh-eating zombie punk rockers, exploding heads and the reborn Sheetar (all of whom are not in the best of humor to be so rudely disturbed at the height of their satanic ceremony). *Blood Diner* is to the eighties what *Bloodsucking Freaks* was to the seventies: you have never seen so much brain-damaged shit spanked into a 90-minute package; nude

kung-fu, Nazi wrestling, bad musical numbers, campy dialogue, gore, more! You simply must see this film. Formerly available from Vestron Video. Unrated.

Captured For Sex

(Japan, 1985) Power mad lesbian dentist cruelly uses and abuses her pretty female patient, tying her up and tormenting her with various S&M horrors. Of course, the lusty lady dentist really wants her vivacious victim to enjoy being her sex slave, but the girl refuses to submit, and the demented dominatrix eventually explodes, she gets so upset! This is a bizarre, dream-like, hallucinatory first entry in Nikkatsu's highly acclaimed (if controversial) *Captured For Sex* series of big-budget, 35mm XXXX bondage films and was followed by two sequels. Interestingly, this was not the Asian porn world's only foray into delicious dentist sex; *Lusty Lady Dentist* is perhaps Hong Kong's hysterical softcore, shot on video answer to *Captured*, but without the bondage. *Dentist* is only in Chinese, while *Captured* is available uncut, uncensored with English subtitles from Threat Theatre International, Inc.

Captured For Sex 2

(Japan, 1985) When a newlywed couple's car breaks down on a deserted country road at night, they are invited back to a weird old man's cabin, where he promises to "help" them — if you can call raping and torturing the blushing young bride helpful that is! The crazy old bastard forces the groom to participate in the ungodly S&M horror, and to his bride's surprise, he likes it! The perverted pair pump wine and marbles into her vagina, then have her squirt it out into glasses for them to drink! Savor that bouquet, boys, it must have been a very good year!

As is common in Japanese films of this type, the poor thing actually ends up enjoying the unbelievable abuse. Perhaps the old man's most incredible torture trick involves hanging three screaming slaves from a web of ropes and caressing their sweat-soaked flesh with burning torches!!! Her husband eventually murders the old sadist after learning all his S&M secrets and drives around town searching for more helpless victims to capture for sex!

This was one of Nikkatsu Studios flagship titles in their "Roman X" series intended for American release, but Japanese electronics giants and auto companies pressured the Japanese state department to force Nikkatsu to buy back all sold copies and ban all future U.S. sales. Presumably, the ensuing public relations disaster that would have occurred should Americans find out just how insanely perverted the Japanese really are was prevented, and the world was made a much poorer place as a result. When was the last time you saw an American porno movie shot on 35mm with acting, lighting, hardcore sex and a plot???

The crushing, traitorous blow dealt to them by their own government forced Nikkatsu to file bankruptcy by 1987. At their peak, Nikkatsu produced approximately 50 "pink" (adult) films per year, as well as a dozen or so "real" movies, and owned its own nation-wide theater chain! In their final years, they produced some of the finest XXX erotic horror/S&M films ever made; each one seemed darker and more perverted than the last, as they knew the end was near and so pushed the boundaries closer to the edge than ever before.

As with nearly all Nikkatsu efforts, *Captured For Sex 2* is available only in Japanese, although a subtitled print with vastly inferior picture quality also exists (do you really need to know what these people are saying?). Both the Japanese and subtitled prints are optically censored (or "fogged") during scenes depicting hardcore (which is, unfortunately, the law in Japan). Still this film is worth it! XXX-rated. The best quality, Japanese language-only print is available from Threat Theatre International.

Daughter Of Rape

(Hong Kong, 1992) This Hysterical rape/comedy/gorefest may be incoherent as hell, never making up its mind whether it's a sex film, a goofy comedy or a splatter film, but damn does it deliver on all three! The movie opens with multiple gory murders which lead to a police "investigation." A pervert cop shows up, grabs a corpse's exposed breasts, insults grieving family members ("Does everyone in your family have big tits?"), then sniffs dead girls' crotches to "tell if they've been raped!"

It turns out the daughter was being incestuously abused and blackmailed by her demented dad (who snaps dirty pictures of her in the shower and cheerfully rapes her from behind while singing "Row, Row, Row Your Boat!") Since no one in her family would help her, she brutally butchered them all in a fit of rage. Quality sleaze that's a laugh riot; boy, can I sniff out a good one or what? Available with English subtitles, X rated.

Faceless

(France, 1989) Gruesomely sleazy updating of Georges Franju's 1959 horror classic *Le Yeux Sans Visage* (translation: *Eyes Without a Face*; aka *Horror Chamber of Dr. Faustus*) from prolific Spanish exploitation director Jesus Franco features an all-star cast (at least by his standards) including Telly Savalas, Caroline Munro, Chris Mitchum, Anton Diffring, Helmut Berger and '70s euro-porn starlet Brigitte Lahaie!

Mad Dr. Flamonde is a plastic surgeon at a private clinic trying to perform a "face transplant" on his acid-scarred nymphomaniac sister with the help of a kinky nurse (Lahaie, lovely as ever) and a gigantic drooling retard rapist! Unsuccessful at first,

he consults with Dr. Orlolf (a long-running Franco character first introduced in 1962's *The Awful Dr. Orlolf*, another mad scientist skin-graft picture!), who tells him to enlist the aid of an ex-Nazi concentration camp scientist currently hiding out from Jewish death squads in Spain. Together, they kidnap and murder hookers and high-fashion models in their quest to perform their operation, which seems doomed to failure as we are treated to grisly scalpel-induced mutilations of sexy girls.

Meanwhile, the half-crazed ugly sister has goblins brought in to slip her some happy sausage, but the nurse kills them by stabbing scissors through their neck if they get too nosy (Like removing the sister's "Phantom of the Opera" mask!) As if this weren't enough, the pathetic retard performs power drill lobotomies on anyone who snoops around the clinic's underground dungeon and even undertakes a little necrophiliac kissy-face with a hooker's severed head he removed with a chainsaw. He tries to rape and brutalize kidnapped coke-head super model Caroline Munro when nobody's looking.

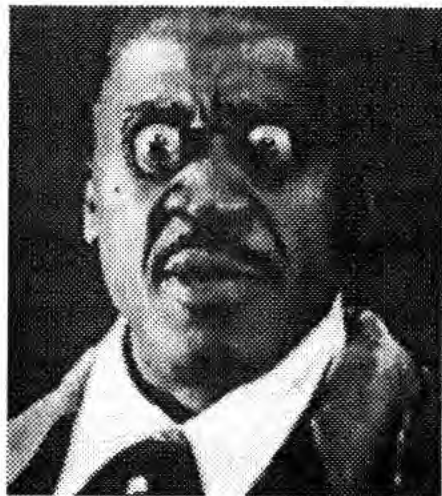
Caroline's father (played by *Kojak*'s Telly Savalas, sans lollypop) dispatches ace private eye Chris Mitchum to the scene, but he is captured and bricked up with Munro in a padded cell while all the bad guys (including the sister, sporting her attractive new face) yuk it up and drink champagne upstairs! The splatter effects are often quite spectacular (even at their worst, they are amazingly over-enthusiastic). The stand-out gore scene has to be the hypodermic needle through the eye, which tops the sharp stick in the eye seen in Lucio Fulci's *Zombie 2* (aka *Zombie* in the U.S.).

This was Franco's last true horror film, and ranks as one of his finest sin-ematic contributions to exploitation filmmaking; he made several more quick action cheapies before fading into obscurity. No doubt this was due to the fact that Rene Chateau, the producer of *Faceless*, entrusted Franco with a small fortune (at least by French standards) to create this little masterpiece for him, but the film bombed terribly at the box office and ruined Chateau's distribution company! No one trusted Franco much after that.

The Freakmaker

(U.K., 1974, aka *The Mutations*.) Gruesome British gorefest starring Donald Pleasence as a mad scientist turning college students into flesh-eating plant monsters and Tom Baker as his deformed Igor-like assistant. The mad doc is trying to cross-breed humans with plants so that we can create a world of peace without fear of war or famine, but you wouldn't know it from watching the results of his hideous experiments in action. Those that fail are dumped off at Igor's travelling freak show, to become the star attractions!

Basically a sleazy updating of Tod Browning's 1932 cult classic *Freaks*, *The Freakmaker* throws plenty of cheap sex and gore along with real freaks mixed in with the phonies to satisfy today's "sophisticated" audiences. The freak of the week award



The Freakmaker

in this one goes to Popeye, a crazy guy who rambles on about growing up black in the South while bug-ging his bloody eyes out of his head like you wouldn't believe. Lots of midgets, too! Directed by Jack Cardiff, who later went on to be director of photography for Universal's *Conan The Destroyer*! The bizarre electronic soundtrack was actually quite popular at the time. Rated R.

Girl Gangs

(Hong Kong, 1992) Softcore sleaze doesn't get much better than this, as straight-laced schoolgirls are seduced and corrupted by pervert pimps, who trick them into being their low-rent whores, living a lurid life of sin-infested suffering for the perverted pleasure of others. They are indoctrinated into their new profession through dope-induced sex orgies and confidence-crumbing mind-games that break their teen-spirits and prevent them from turning to their friends and families for help, because now they are "dirty" and unworthy of aid.

When one of the jailbait hooker's old friends (a good little virgin who wouldn't play any of the pimp's reindeer games) is kidnapped and brutally gang-raped by the hemp-huffing hooligans, the girls strike back and the pimps are massacred in a gory police shoot-out. The head pimp is subsequently hunted down and violently dealt with by his ex-hookers. With hot chicks and kung-fu kicks, *Girl Gangs* is one Chinese film you'll be hungry to watch again half an hour after you finish it. Available with English subtitles. X-rated.



Daughter of Rape

Grim Reaper

(Italy, 1980 aka *Anthrophagous The Beast*) Degenerate cannibal maniac chows down on teenage tourists stranded on his deserted Greek island (he ate the rest of the inhabitants!). Surprisingly eerie and atmospheric entry in the early eighties stalk-slash trend first popularized by *Halloween* and *Friday The 13th*. Released cut in the U.S., the film originally featured an extra 10 minutes of gory murders and the incredible, show-stopping mutilation of a pregnant woman whose flopping fetus is ripped out and devoured by the flesh-eating psychopath!

Absolutely tasteless mess cleaned up at the box office, prompting Ator director Joe D'Amato (here posing as "Peter Newton") to make a gory sequel, *Grim Reaper 2*, (aka *Absurd*, *Monster Hunter*, *Anthrophagae 2*) the next year. Interestingly, both films pseudonymously star Luigi Montefiore (the screenwriter for Michele Soavi's 1987 slasher *Stage Fright*) as completely unrelated cannibal freaks who just happen to look exactly alike! *Grim Reaper* was actually accused of being a "snuff" movie by the BBC, despite the fact that the supposedly "murdered" actress who plays the pregnant girl has continued to turn up in other films!!! Rated "X" by the MPAA in its uncut form, the picture does not contain explicit sex, just some tits to go with the terror.

Maniac From Hell

(Japan, 1992) Wedding night turns into a nightmare for a weeping wife whose husband has concentration camp fantasies about dead Jews and still sleeps with his mother! And I do mean he sleeps



Grim Reaper

with his mother! He turns his bride's hair into a Christmas tree (complete with lights) and forces her to perform oral sex on him while he talks to her through a Barbie doll. When she discovers his filthy little incest secrets, the freak family lock her up in a skeleton-filled dungeon! A brain-dead bisexual football player she had an affair with comes to the rescue, but ends up running away with her homo-hubby instead.

Unfortunately, mommy dearest becomes enraged at all this fooling around and busts into the secret dungeon hell-cell wearing a tight rubber outfit and wielding a chainsaw! She chases her despised daughter-in-law through the house, resulting in the world's first porno film to feature a kung-fu chainsaw catfight (complete with badly dubbed-in karate-chop sound effects and yowling cat screeches!). One of the weirdest pieces of filmmaking you'll ever see. What were these people thinking? The pic is in Japanese language only and is optically censored. XXX-rated.

Nightmare In Badham County

(U.S.A., 1976 aka *Nightmare*) Chicks in chains are raped in pain by sadistic rednecks and Kentucky-fried lesbians in this super-sleaze that aims to please, from ABC-TV! Deborah Raffin and Lynn Moody are two cute college girls on a cross-country trip suddenly framed for prostitution in a small Southern town, raped and sent to live out the rest of their lives at the Badham County Work Farm. Presiding over the fiendish festivities at the creep-camp is none other than warden Robert Reed, the mad dad who horrified you in *The Brady Bunch*. Ginger (Tina Louise) from *Gilligan's Island* helps out by stripping and beating the terrified female inmates for stealing potatoes and other unforgivable offenses against God and country.

The two girls try desperately to escape their prison hell, but are continually caught and punished until they get lucky; then it's time for a final confrontation with the evil horn-dog sheriff who put them there. Nude inserts and catfights were filmed for its theatrical release, but the picture was heavily edited for television. This is indisputably the sleaziest, nastiest film ever financed by a major television network. *Nightmare* was directed by John Llewellyn Moxey, the man who brought you *Horror Hotel* in 1960! Also starring Chuck Connors, Della Reese, Ralph Bellamy and a ton of naked, tortured women! Available from VidMark Entertainment! In its original, uncut, "R-rated" version.

(*Captured For Sex 1 & 2*, *Daughter Of Rape*, *Faceless*, *The Freakmaker*, *Girl Gangs*, *Grim Reaper*, *Lusty Lady Dentist*, and *Maniac From Hell* are available on high-quality VHS video uncut from Threat Theatre International, P.O. Box 7633, Olympia, WA 98507-7633. Videos are \$19.95 each plus \$2.05 S&H per tape. A signed statement of age certifying you are 21 years of age or older and request adult-oriented material is required.

The Awful Dr. Orlolf and *Horror Chamber of Dr. Faustus* are available from Sinister Cinema, P.O. Box 4369, Medford, OR 97501-0168. Prices: \$16.95 each, plus \$2.05 S&H per tape.

Check your local video store for *Blood Diner* and *Nightmare In Badham County*. ■

Gamera — Giant Monster Decisive Air Battle

Gamera comes roaring back to life after a 15 year absence!

A Cult Movies exclusive first look at the new Gamera film!

By David Milner

Gamera — Giant Monster Decisive Air Battle (1995), a movie in which the giant flying turtle introduced in *Gamera* (1965) and killed in *Gamera — Super Monster* (1980) is recreated, does have a few similarities to the eight previous Gamera films. Gamera prevents people from being harmed, he draws strength from fire and he temporarily is incapacitated by injuries. However, the movie for the most part is very different from the earlier Gamera films. It is not a children's film and the special effects in it are not substandard.

At the beginning of the new film, a monolith with strange writing on it is found on Gamera's back. When the writing is translated, it is discovered that Gamera and Gaos, the giant bird-like creature which also appears in *Gamera Vs. Gaos* (1967) and *Gamera Vs. Guiron* (1969), are products of genetic engineering. This idea provides an at least somewhat plausible explanation for the tremendous size and unique abilities of the monsters. However, the idea that Gamera and Gaos were created 12 thousand years ago by people who lived on the lost continent of Atlantis stretches credibility quite a bit.

Despite the farfetched quality of the explanation for the existence of Gamera and Gaos, *Gamera — Giant Monster Decisive Air Battle* is much more believable than many other giant monster movies. This is because Shusuke Kaneko's direction of the film is very straightforward and very good.

Special effects director Shinji Higuchi also deserves a great deal of credit for his work on the movie. The pyrotechnics display seen when the Japanese Self Defense Force attacks Gamera is very impressive, the footage of Gamera making his way through Fukuoka is very atmospheric and the entire sequence in which Gamera chases Gaos in the skies above Tokyo is both fresh and exhilarating.

The optical effects are not as abundant as those in *Godzilla Vs. Mothra* (1992), *Godzilla Vs. Space Godzilla* (1994) and the other recent *Godzilla* films. However, they are just as exciting. The supersonic beam emitted by Gaos in particular is well animated.

The computer graphics are outstanding. The missiles that are fired at Gaos, the bombs that are dropped on Gamera and the "plasma fire balls" that are fired at Gaos by Gamera all are very convincing and intimidating.

All of the composite shots are convincing, but those of people fleeing from Gamera and those of Gaos carrying a train car over the streets of Tokyo especially seem seamless.

Whenever Gamera is injured in *Gamera — Giant Monster Decisive Air Battle*, wounds that are identical to his appear on the body of a young girl named Asagi Kusanagi. This al-

lows those who see the movie to identify with Gamera more strongly and thus makes it more affecting for them. However, Asagi is much too reminiscent of Miki Saegusa, the psychic with a telepathic link to *Godzilla* who appears in *Godzilla Vs. Biollante* (1989), *Godzilla Vs. Ghidra* (1991) and all of the subsequent *Godzilla* films.

Ayako Fujitani, who plays Asagi, gives a flat performance. One can see the pain on Asagi's face when Gamera's wounds appear on her body, but the pain does not seem to be all that great.

Akira Onodera, who plays Yasu Marine Insurance agent Naoya Kusanagi, gives an understated but affecting performance. Mr. Onodera subtly shows the professionalism required by Kusanagi's job and the tenderness required by his daughter.

Yoshinari Yonemori, the naval officer portrayed by Tsuyoshi Ihara, and Mayumi Nagamine, the ornithologist portrayed by Shinoby Nakayama, seem genuine. They both are spirited, but Yonemori in particular seems

to two other movies. Some of the footage of Gamera making his way through Fukuoka is similar to some of the footage of *Godzilla* destroying Tokyo in *Godzilla — King of the Monsters* (1954) and in a shot that is very much like the one of Batman's airplane being silhouetted by the moon in *Batman* (1989), Gaos is seen suddenly spreading his wings after he flies above the moon as it is seen from the point of view of the camera. These references are very brief, so instead of being derivative, they merely seem reminiscent.

Kazunori Ito's screenplay is an excellent one. It strikes a good balance between focusing on the activities on people and those of the monsters. In addition, it has a timely environmental theme.

Ko Otani's score also is excellent. It makes the scope of the new film seem enormous without making it seem pretentious. The highlights of the score are "Gaos Flees," a very dynamic piece that is heard shortly after Gamera arrives in Fukuoka, and "Gamera Flees," a very dynamic piece that is heard

Despite the farfetched quality of the explanation for the existence of Gamera and Gaos, *Gamera - Giant Monster Decisive Air Battle* is much more believable than many other giant monster movies. This is because Shusuke Kaneko's direction of the film is very straightforward and very good.

like he indeed is reacting to the doings of giant monsters that can't be subdued.

Kojiro Hongo, who is best known as Kasuke, one of the fortune hunters in *Gamera Vs. Barugon* (1966) and Shiro Tsutsumi, the engineer in *Gamera Vs. Gaos*, makes a cameo appearance in *Gamera — Giant Monster Decisive Air Battle* as a ship captain. So, too, does Akira Kubo, who is best known as Tetsui Teri, the inventor in *Godzilla Vs. Monster Zero* (1965) and Katsuo Yamabe, the captain of the SY-3 spaceship in *Destroy All Monsters* (1968). Both Mr. Kubo and Mr. Hongo do a more than adequate job of showing the appropriate concern when Gamera is discovered floating on the surface of the ocean.

The Gamera costume is similar to the Gamera costumes that were constructed for the previous Gamera movies. Like those costumes, it has two especially long teeth jutting up from its lower jaw.

The Gaos costume is similar to the one that was constructed for *Gamera Vs. Gaos*, and refurbished for *Gamera Vs. Guiron*, but it has a much more sinister look to it.

Gamera's roar remains unchanged. However, Gaos' now is much more like the call of a bird. This and the footage of Gaos hunting and feeding make him seem very much like a real animal.

There are a number of references in *Gamera — Giant Monster Decisive Air Battle* not only to the earlier Gamera films, but also

shortly after Gamera arrives in Fukuoka, and "Gamera Shoots Down," a piece featuring many of the same themes as "Gaos Flees" that is heard during one of the first battles between Gamera and Gaos.

The verse of "Myth," the song performed by Japanese rock group Blast Slump while the ending credits are shown, does not flow quite as smoothly as it should. However, the chorus of the song is very catchy.

Junichi Tozawa's photography is good. The many head and shoulders shots of Asagi, Yonemori and so on allow those who see *Gamera — Giant Monster Decisive Air Battle* to identify with the characters very strongly because they make them seem very near.

The many low angle shots of Gamera and Gaos taken by special effects photographer Hiroshi Kidokoro make them seem immense.

The editing is more than adequate. None of the scenes are too brief or too long and all of the transitions from one scene to the next are smooth.

It is rumored that the Daiiei Company Ltd., the studio which makes the Gamera movies, is going to produce a new sequel in which Gamera will again face Viras, the giant squid from outer space that appears in the fourth Gamera film, *Destroy All Planets* (1968). If a sequel is produced, it will have to be made with great care. This is because the quality of the movie will be measured against that of one of the best of all the giant monster films. ■

Shinji Higuchi Interview

by David Milner
and Guy Tucker
Translated by
Yoshihiko Shibata

Shinji Higuchi directed the special effects for *Gamera — Giant Monster Decisive Air Battle* (1995). Mr. Higuchi also directed the special effects for *Counterattack of the Eight-Headed Snake of Yamata* (1986), *Nine Lives* (1990), *Mikadroid* (1991) and *Future Memory* (1993).

Cult Movies: Did you take part in writing the script for *Gamera — Giant Monster Decisive Air Battle*?

SH: The first draft was written solely by the screenwriter, Kazunori Ito, but I took part in writing all three of the subsequent drafts.

CM: How was the first draft different from the final one?

SH: There originally were going to be five Gaoses instead of three. (Gaos also appears in *Gamera Vs. Gaos* (1967) and *Gamera Vs. Guiron* (1969).) In addition, several sequences were cut. One was a battle between Gamera and the Japanese Self Defense Force at the Gukuoka Dome and another was an air battle between Gamera and the Self Defense Force. (The Fukuoka Dome is a baseball stadium located in Fukuoka.)

The Riverside mansion, a huge apartment building located in Tokyo near the Sumida River, originally was going to be destroyed instead of Tokyo Tower. We planned to destroy the building because it never before had been destroyed by a monster, but we decided instead to destroy Tokyo Tower because of its notoriety.

CM: Why were the battle sequences deleted from the first draft?

SH: Budgetary reasons.

CM: Did Shusuke Kaneko take part in revising the script? (Mr. Kaneko directed *Gamera — Giant Monster Decisive Air Battle*.)

SH: Yes. It wasn't his idea to cut the sequences. It was mine.

CM: What changes did Mr. Kaneko make to the screenplay?

SH: He changed some of the scenes featuring the Self Defense Force. For example, there originally was going to be a shot of F-15 fighter aircraft taking off right after the first shots of Gaos flying in the skies over Tokyo, but Mr. Kaneko decided not to use it. (Gamera kills two of the three Gaoses before the remaining one appears in Tokyo.)

There was a battle between Gaos and a number of F-15s in the first two drafts of the script. During the battle, one of the F-15s was going to be sliced apart by Gaos' supersonic beam and debris from the plane was going to fall on the Yurakucho Mullion building. However, the scene was deleted because

representatives of the Self Defense Force objected to it. They argued that it would never actually take place because Self Defense Force pilots are trained to minimize civilian casualties. (The Yurakucho Mullion building is located near Ginza.)

CM: Is it true that the original design of Gamera was different from the final one?

SH: I originally envisioned the new Gamera as a sea turtle instead of a land turtle. His flippers were going to function as wings while he was flying. However, the producers said that my design didn't look enough like the old Gamera, so I had to change it.

CM: Spikes come out of Gamera's elbows at one point in *Gamera — Giant Monster Decisive Air Battle*. Why were they included in the design?

SH: The old Gamera looks like he has no elbows to me, so I wanted those of the new one to stand out. I included the spikes in my original design, but the producers said that they also made the new Gamera look too different from the old one.

I showed the spikes in order to protest the rejection of my design. However, I hid them



Shinji Higuchi

until the very end of *Gamera — Giant Monster Decisive Air Battle* because they had been rejected.

CM: Was the original design of Gaos any different from the final one?

SH: The design of Gaos was changed only because I found that I had to have a person in a costume portray the monster. I originally had intended to portray Gaos only with puppets. (Gaos is shown standing not just on two legs, but also on the claws on her wings, in some pre-production sketches.)

CM: Why did you have short actors play Gamera and Gaos? (Gamera is played by Takateru Manabe. Gaos is played by Yumi Kameyama.)

SH: I wanted to shoot a large amount of low angle footage of Gamera and Gaos and the only way to avoid having the ceiling of the set be seen in the footage was to have short actors play the monsters.

CM: Were there any other reasons for having short actors play Gamera and Gaos?

SH: Yes. We saved money by doing so. If the monster actors are tall, the miniature sets must be large, but if the monster actors are short, smaller sets can be used. We saved

money by using small sets because it costs more to construct and maintain larger sets than smaller ones. In addition, if the monster actors are short, only two people are needed to help them get in and out of their costumes. Three or four people are needed to help taller monster actors get in and out of their costumes.

CM: Why did you have a woman play Gaos?

SH: I needed a woman to play Gaos because the shape of a woman's body is different from that of a man's. In addition, since virtually all of the people who work in the special effects field are men, I thought that I could make it a little easier for women to enter the field by having one play Gaos.

CM: How long did it take to construct the miniature sets?

SH: We started drawing the blueprints for the miniature buildings in January, 1994 and finished constructing the buildings about six months later. We spent only two or three months actually constructing the buildings.

CM: How many miniature buildings did you make?

SH: We made about 40 of them.

CM: How much time did you spend shooting the special effects footage?

SH: One hundred and one days.

CM: How much time did you spend in post production?

SH: Two months.

CM: Shortly after the three Gaoses are placed in cages, they emit a supersonic beam in order to break free. How did you create the visual distortions that represent this?

SH: Digital compositing. (Digital composites are images that are created when a computer is used to combine two or more preexisting images.)

CM: Were computers used to create any of the other special effects?

SH: Yes. Gamera's revolving jets, Gamera's plasma fire balls, the missiles and the guided bombs all were created with computers.

CM: What kinds of computers did you use to create the effects?

SH: A Silicon Graphics Indigo, a Macintosh and an IBM-compatible.

CM: Did you or Mr. Kaneko edit the special effects footage?

SH: I would show the footage to Mr. Kaneko after I'd edited it. If he gave his approval, the editing that I'd done would be retained.

CM: Did Mr. Kaneko have the right to make the final decisions about the editing?

SH: Yes. He did.

CM: Did any of the people who worked on the recent Godzilla films work on *Gamera — Giant Monster Decisive Air Battle*? (Among the recent Godzilla movies are *Godzilla Vs. Biollante* (1989), *Godzilla Vs. Mothra* (1992), and *Godzilla Vs. Space Godzilla* (1994).)

SH: Yes. Quite a few. For example, the assistant special effects director, Makoto Kamiya, previously had worked as an assistant to Koichi Kawakita. (Mr. Kawakita directed the special effects for the last five Godzilla films. He also directed the special effects for *Sayonara Jupiter* (1984), *Yamato Takeru* (1994) and several other movies.)

CM: A few of the shots in *Gamera — Giant Monster Decisive Air Battle* are reminiscent of those in the earlier Gamera films. Who made the decision to include them in the movie?

SH: It is merely a coincidence that those shots are in the film. I did not intend to try to remind the members of the audience of the

(continued)

earlier Gamera films.

CM: There also are a few shots in *Gamera — Giant Monster Decisive Air Battle* that are reminiscent of some of those in *Godzilla — King of the Monsters* (1954). Who made the decision to include them in the film?

SH: Believe it or not, those shots were also not intentionally included in the movie. Many people feel that I am paying homage to their first *Godzilla* film, but I didn't intend to do so. I think that ideas which seemed completely original to me were in fact images from the first *Godzilla* movie that had been implanted in my subconscious.

CM: The new Gamera film is more of a horror film than any of the recent *Godzilla* movies. Did you intend to have it turn out that way?

SH: Although I did not try to pay homage to *Godzilla — King of the Monsters*, the approach I took toward making *Gamera — Giant Monster Decisive Air Battle* was somewhat similar to the one with which the first *Godzilla* film was made.

CM: Is it true that the size of the production budget for *Gamera — Giant Monster Decisive Air Battle* was about half the size of the production budgets for the last few *Godzilla* films?

SH: Yes.

CM: Did you feel limited by the size of the production budget?

SH: Yes. It wasn't a matter of deleting any scenes, but instead one of the quality of the scenes. I originally envisioned much finer images than those we ended up creating, but budgetary constraints forced me to make a large number of changes. That was the most regrettable aspect of working on *Gamera — Giant Monster Decisive Air Battle*.

CM: Did you use all the footage that you'd shot?

SH: Only two unimportant shots weren't used. One was a shot of one of the Gaoses flying away from a helicopter. I didn't use it because it wasn't very convincing. The other shot was one of debris falling to the ground as Gamera crashes into a building. That one was convincing, but it didn't fit in with the other footage of Gamera crashing into the building.

CM: Why was the new Gamera film distributed by Toho? (The Dai-ichi Company Ltd. so far has produced nine Gamera films. The Toho Company Ltd. has produced all 21 of the *Godzilla* movies, and other genre films such as *Rodan* (1956), *Mothra* (1961), and *King Kong Escapes* (1967).)

SH: Dai-ichi has no distribution network.

CM: Is it true that the new Gamera film originally was going to be much shorter and shown on a double bill with an animated movie?

SH: I have never heard that.

CM: You worked on *Godzilla 1985* (1984) as a "special modeler." What exactly did you do?

SH: I took part in the construction of the *Godzilla* costume.

CM: Did you take part in the construction of the *Godzilla* cyborg? (The five meter tall cyborg/robot was used in the production and promotion of *Godzilla 1985*.)

SH: No.

CM: Did you work with Nobuyuki Yasumaru? (Mr. Yasumaru is the head of Toho's special arts department.)

SH: Yes.

CM: What was working with Mr. Yasumaru

like?

SH: It was enjoyable.

CM: Did you work with Teruyoshi Nakano? (Mr. Nakano directed the special effects for *Godzilla 1985*. He also directed the special effects for *Godzilla Vs. the Smog Monster* (1971), *The War In Space* (1977) and many other movies.)

SH: I didn't work on *Godzilla 1985* with him, but I did work on *Space World* with him. (It is a theme park located in Kyushu.)

CM: What was working with Mr. Nakano like?

SH: He was very outgoing.

CM: Have you ever worked with Mr. Kawakita?

SH: I worked on *Sayonara Jupiter* with him. I was just an amateur at the time. Mr. Kawakita made me work very hard, but I didn't mind because I was so glad to be working in the film industry.

CM: In what capacity did you work on *Sayonara Jupiter*?

SH: I was a production assistant.

CM: You drew the storyboards for the special effects scenes in *Ultra Q — The Movie* (1990). Did the scenes turn out the way you originally had envisioned them? (*Ultra Q — The Movie* is based on the *Ultra Q* (1966) television series. The film was directed by Mr. Kaneko.)

SH: They did turn out the way I'd envisioned them.

CM: Who plays the mikadroid in *Mikadroid*?

SH: Hurricane Ryu. (He also plays Ghidrah in *Godzilla Vs. Ghidrah* (1991), Battra in *Godzilla Vs. Mothra*, Baby *Godzilla* in *Godzilla Vs. Mechagodzilla* (1993), and the Kumasō in *Yamato Takeru*.)

CM: Was it difficult for him to remain in the mikadroid costume for a long period of time?

SH: It was difficult because he was playing a robot.

CM: Is playing a robot any more difficult than playing a giant monster?

SH: Hurricane Ryu had to move the way a robot that had been forgotten for half a century would move. That made it a little more challenging for him to play the mikadroid than it would have been for him to play a giant monster. (*Mikadroid* is set in the present, but features a robot constructed during World War II.)

CM: You worked on the designs of the monsters in the *Ultraman Powered* (1995) television series. Did anyone else take part in designing the monsters?

SH: I didn't design them by myself. I drew the first drafts of the design and then the head designer, Mahiro Maeda, drew the final ones.

CM: How did you react when you were asked to direct the special effects for *Gamera — Giant Monster Decisive Air Battle*?

SH: I originally was only going to design the monsters with Mr. Maeda. One day I asked the producers who the special effects director was going to be, and they told me that they had not yet chosen one. So, I asked to be the special effects director.

CM: What was working with Mr. Kaneko like?

SH: Mr. Kaneko is a big fan of monster movies, but he managed to maintain a professional detachment while he was working on *Gamera — Giant Monster Decisive Air Battle*.

CM: Are you pleased with the way *Gamera — Giant Monster Decisive Air Battle* turned

out?

SH: I get a different impression every time I see the film. The first time I saw it, I was very upset because it had turned out to be so different from what I originally had envisioned. The second time I saw the movie, I was still very upset so I just watched the scenes featuring Kojiro Hongo and Akira Kubo and then left the theater. (Mr. Kubo and Mr. Hongo make cameo appearances as ship captains at the beginning of the film. Mr. Hongo is best known as Kasuke, one of the fortune hunters in *Gamera Vs. Barugon*, Shiro Tsutsumi, the engineer in *Gamera Vs. Gaos* and Nobuhiko Shimada, the scoutmaster in *Destroy All Planets*. Mr. Kubo is best known as Tetsui Teri, the inventor in *Godzilla Vs. Monster Zero*, Goro Maki, the reporter in *Son of Godzilla* and Katsuo Yamabe, the captain of the SY-3 in *Destroy All Monsters*.)

CM: Which of the older science fiction films produced by Toho are your favorites?

SH: The first ones I saw were *Tidal Wave* (1973) and *Last Days of Planet Earth* (1974), so they were my favorites when I was young. I now especially like *Attack of the Mushroom People* (1963) and *The Human Vapor*.

CM: What is it you like about those two movies?

SH: Kumi Mizuno and Kaoru Yachigusa are irresistible. (Ms. Yachigusa plays Fujichiyō, the dancer in *The Human Vapor*. Ms. Mizuno, who is best known as Miss Namikawa, the woman from Planet X in *Godzilla Vs. Monster Zero* (1965) and Dayo, the Infant Island native in *Godzilla Vs. the Sea Monster* (1966), plays television star Maimi Sekeguchi in *Attack of the Mushroom People*.)

CM: How do you like the recent *Godzilla* films?

SH: You will see the answer if you carefully watch *Gamera — Giant Monster Decisive Air Battle*.

CM: What do you think of Mr. Kawakita's work?

SH: I learned much from it.

CM: How do you like the older Gamera films?

SH: I grew up watching Toho's science fiction films, so I don't take the older Gamera movies very seriously. They seem like comedies to me.

While I was working on *Ultraman Powered* in Los Angeles, I saw The Comedy Channel on cable television. While I was watching the channel, I saw someone say, "Hey, I'm going to show you the funniest visual image that has ever been created on this planet!" It was Gamera doing a back flip in *Gamera Vs. Gubron*. So, I learned that Americans also see the older Gamera films as comedies. (*Ultraman Powered* was shot in Los Angeles in 1993.)

CM: Is Dai-ichi planning to produce any other Gamera movies?

SH: Dai-ichi's executives are discussing the idea of producing a sequel, but they have not yet made a final decision about it. I've heard a rumor that if a sequel is made, Viras will be in it. (Gamera and Viras do battle in *Destroy All Planets*.)

CM: How do you feel about TriStar Pictures producing a *Godzilla* film in the United States?

SH: It should be good.

CM: Are you looking forward to seeing the movie?

SH: Yes, I am. ■

Akira Kubo Interview

by Dave Milner
and Guy Tucker
Translation by
Yoshihiko Shibata

Akira Kubo is best known as Tetsui Teri, the inventor in *Godzilla Vs. Monster Zero*, Goro Maki, the reporter in *Son of Godzilla* and Katsuo Yamabe, the captain of the SY-3 spaceship in *Destroy All Monsters*. However, Mr. Kubo also appears in *Sound of the Waves* (1954), *Westward Desperado* (1960), *Gamera — Giant Monster Decisive Air Battle* (1995) and a large number of other films.

Cult Movies: Is it true that you have been acting since you were a child?

Akira Kubo: I've been acting since I was 11 years old.

A very famous radio program entitled *The Hill From Which the Bell Tolls* was broadcast right after the end of World War II. It told a very heartwarming story about children who had been orphaned by the war. The program was so popular that a play based on it was produced. I played one of the orphans in the play. I was told that I didn't look like an orphan, so I was given a very small role when the play ran in Tokyo. However, I was given one of the leading roles when the play ran in rural areas.

A film based on the play was produced in 1948. It was directed by Ko Sasaki. (Mr. Sasaki also directed *Rumba of Passion* (1951), *The Last Boss* (1963) and many other movies.) Keiji Sada was given the leading role and I again played one of the orphans. (Mr. Sada is best known as Goto, the man who marries the daughter of the widow in *Late Autumn* (1960) and Koichi Hirayama, the son of the man who convinces his daughter that she should marry in *An Autumn Afternoon* (1962).)

CM: Have you taken any acting classes?

AK: No. I worked on some stage productions in school, but I haven't had any professional training.

CM: Akira Kurosawa originally was not going to direct *Throne of Blood* (1957). Do you know who was? (Mr. Kurosawa also directed *Sanshiro Sugata* (1943), *Seven Samurai* (1954), *Not Yet Ready* (1993), and a large number of other films.)

AK: I never before have heard that. I would guess that Mr. Kurosawa's chief assistant director, Hiromichi Horikawa, originally was going to direct the movie.

CM: Mr. Kurosawa once said that he very much enjoyed working on *Sanjuro* (1962). Was the mood on the set of the film any different from the mood on the set of *The Throne of Blood*? (Mr. Horikawa originally was going to direct *SANJURO*.)

AK: The movies Mr. Kurosawa directed before 1961 weren't very successful because they were too artistic. So, Mr. Kurosawa's

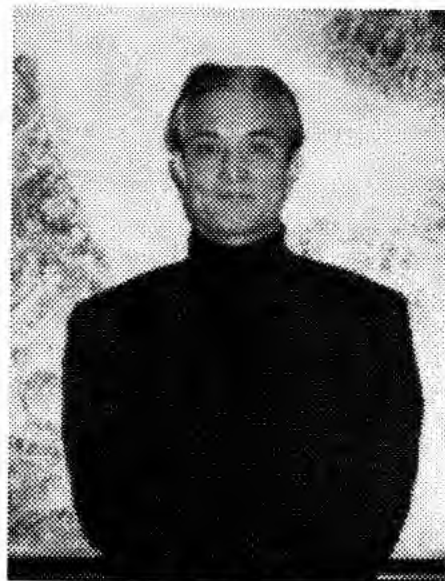
reputation among film studio executives was not a very good one. In 1961, Mr. Kurosawa decided to make a simple but still profound movie. That's why *Yojimbo* (1961) and *Sanjuro* are so different from his earlier films. (*Sanjuro* is a sequel to *Yojimbo*.)

When we were working on *The Throne of Blood*, Mr. Kurosawa behaved the way I'd imagined he would. He was very forceful and he took his work very seriously. However, when we were working on *Sanjuro*, Mr. Kurosawa behaved very differently. He was very warm and friendly. So, the mood on the set of *Sanjuro* was very different from the mood on the set of *The Throne of Blood*.

CM: What was working with Mr. Kurosawa like?

AK: Mr. Kurosawa is very different from other directors. Most directors spend only a short period of time in rehearsal, but Mr. Kurosawa spends a large amount of time in rehearsal.

We spent an entire month rehearsing for *Sanjuro*. Mr. Kurosawa insisted that we wear kimonos and real swords — the very heavy metal ones — during rehearsals. We gradually got used to wearing the kimonos and swords. We also gradually got used to saying our lines.



Akira Kubo

I remember that in *Sanjuro*, Mr. Kurosawa wanted to present an image of samurai that was very different from the stereotypical one. He also wanted there to be a clear contrast between *Sanjuro Tsubaki* and the younger samurai in the movie. (*Sanjuro Tsubaki* is played by Toshiro Mifune. In *The Throne of Blood*, Mr. Mifune plays Taketoko Washizu, the samurai who murders his superiors in order to gain their power.)

CM: What was working with Toshiro Mifune like? (He is best known as Kikuchiyo, one of the samurai in *Seven Samurai*.)

AK: Mr. Mifune is a very fine man. He is very honest.

Mr. Mifune treated me as an equal. He wasn't at all pretentious. Mr. Mifune, like Mr. Kurosawa, took his work very seriously. He sometimes would become a little nervous about it.

CM: How long did it take to shoot *The Three Treasures* (1959)? (The running time of the film is one hundred and eighty-two minutes.)

AK: I don't know how long it took to shoot

the entire movie, but I spent one week working on it. (Mr. Kubo has a very small role in the film.)

CM: What was working with Hiroshi Inagaki like? (Mr. Inagaki directed *The Three Treasures*. He also directed *The Wandering Gambler* (1928), *Forgotten Children* (1949), *Under the Banner of Samurai* (1969) and many other movies.)

AK: Mr. Inagaki was very friendly. He also was very tactful with me and the other less experienced actors.

I worked on *Chushingura* (1962) and a few ninja films with Mr. Inagaki. I also worked on *Tempest* (1956) with him. It was based on a novel by Toson Shimazaki.

CM: The scope of *Gorath* (1962) is much broader than that of all of the other science fiction films in which you appear. Was the mood on the set of the film any different from on the sets of other science fiction movies on which you worked because of this?

AK: I was very well aware of the broad scope of *Gorath* while I was working on it. I think more money was spent on the production of the movie than was spent on any of the other science fiction films on which I worked. However, I and the other actors who worked on *Gorath* always tried to do our best, so I wouldn't say that the mood on the set was any different from the other science fiction films on which I worked.

CM: Did it take the makeup artists who worked on *Attack of the Mushroom People* (1963) very long to do their work?

AK: They did spend a large amount of time doing their work.

I like *Attack of the Mushroom People* very much. I think the drama, rather than the special effects or the makeup, is what makes it entertaining. Fans who are in their mid-thirties always tell me that when they were children, they became terrified of eating mushrooms after they saw the movie.

I very much enjoyed working on *Attack of the Mushroom People*. I remember that Mr. Honda spent a long period of time explaining what the film was really about. (Isiro Honda directed *Attack of the Mushroom People*. He also directed *Gorath*, *Godzilla Vs. Monster Zero*, *Yog — Monster From Space*, and a large number of other movies.)

There were many American soldiers in Japan during the Vietnam War. Almost every one of them who ran into me said, "I know you!" I would always ask in which film they'd seen me, and they would always say that it was *Attack of the Mushroom People*.

CM: What was working with Hiroshi Tachikawa like? (Mr. Tachikawa plays one of the young samurai in *Sanjuro*, a member of the crew of the J-X Eagle spaceship in *Gorath* and Etsuro Yoshida, the mystery writer, in *Attack of the Mushroom People*.)

AK: Mr. Tachikawa was a member of Shingeki. He often performed at the Halyuza Theater in Tokyo. (The Toho Company Ltd. is Japan's largest movie studio. Shingeki is its stage division.)

Mr. Tachikawa is more suited for works that are set in the present than period pieces. His image is one of a very sophisticated man.

CM: What was working with Nick Adams like? (Mr. Adams plays Glenn, the American astronaut, in *Godzilla Vs. Monster Zero*.)

AK: Mr. Adams was a man full of Yankee spirit. He was very outgoing. I very much enjoyed working with him. He would do very funny things like disguise himself as James

(continued)

Cagney. When Mr. Adams left Japan, he gave me his suit as a gift.

CM: You know why he did that?

AK: The suit fitted me.

CM: Was working with the full-scale model of one of the legs of Spiga very difficult? (Spiga is the giant spider seen in *Son of Godzilla* and *Destroy All Monsters* in new footage and *Godzilla's Revenge* (1969) in stock footage.)

AK: Is Spiga in *Son of Godzilla*?

CM: Yes.

AK: My memories of Spiga are a little vague.

CM: Is it true that Yoshiro Tsuchiya and Kenji Sahara switched roles shortly before production on *Yog — Monster From Space* (1970) got underway because Mr. Tsuchiya wanted to surprise genre fans by having someone else play the malevolent character? (Mr. Tsuchiya, who plays such characters in *Battle in Outer Space* (1959), *Son of Godzilla* and a number of Toho's other science fiction films, plays Dr. Kyoichi Miya, a paleontologist, in *Yog — Monster From Space*. Mr. Sahara plays Makoto Obata, an industrial spy whose body is taken over by aliens from outer space.)

AK: That's probably true.

CM: Where was *Yog — Monster From Space* shot?

AK: We went to Guam to shoot the movie.

CM: A number of other science fiction films in which you appear are set on tropical islands. Where were they shot?

AK: Hachijo Island, Izu or Gotemba, which is located right next to Mt. Fujiyama.

CM: Did you go to visit the special effects sets of *Gorath*, *Godzilla Vs. Monster Zero*, and so on?

AK: I did not have much of an opportunity to visit the special effects sets. I always was too busy working on the standard ones. However, during the production of *Gorath*, I and some of the other actors had to go to the special effects set to shoot some scenes. While I was there, I discovered that members of the special effects staff had to have a great deal of patience. I was amazed by how long it took to set up a shot that would last for only a few seconds.

CM: What was working with Mr. Sahara like? (He is best known as Kazuo Fujita, the inventor in *King Kong Vs. Godzilla* and Jiro Torahata, the entrepreneur in *Godzilla Vs. Mothra*.)

AK: Mr. Sahara called me Kubo-chan even though I'd been working as an actor for a longer period of time. (Chan is used to indicate that the person being referred to is a child. It also is used as an expression of affection by adults who are good friends with each other.) He used Tadashi Ishihara as his stage name until 1956. The Japanese character for Tadashi can also be read as Chu, so I called Mr. Sahara Chu-san for a while. I afterward called him Ken-bo, which means boy Ken. Even now I call him Ken-bo and he calls me Kubo-chan. (San, which is used to show respect, can be attached to a person's first or last name.)

CM: What was working with Mr. Tsuchiya like? (He is best known as the controller of Planet X in *Godzilla Vs. Monster Zero* and Dr. Otani, one of the people who are controlled by aliens from outer space in *Destroy All Monsters*.)

AK: Mr. Tsuchiya and I were very close friends, even though he was older than me.

Mr. Tsuchiya is a very good flamenco guitarist. I was amazed when I saw him perform on television. I started playing the guitar be-

cause I was so inspired by him, but I did not play flamenco music. I don't play anymore.

CM: What was working with Mr. Honda like?

AK: There are two types of directors. Some, like Mr. Inagaki, just sit in their chairs and have the assistant directors interact with the members of the cast. Others, like Mr. Kurosawa, walk around and directly interact with the members of the cast. Mr. Honda had characteristics of both types of directors. When he felt he needed to give instructions to the actors he would do so himself. However, he sometimes would just sit in his chair and watch the actors do their work.

Mr. Honda was a gentleman. He never got angry. He always was calm.

I recognized Mr. Honda's touch when I saw *Rhapsody in August* (1991). I think the movie strikes a balance between the styles of Mr. Kurosawa and Mr. Honda. (Mr. Kurosawa directed the film. Mr. Honda worked on it as a creative consultant.)

CM: What was working with Jun Fukuda like? (Mr. Fukuda directed *Son of Godzilla*.)

"I like Attack of the Mushroom People very much. I think the drama, rather than the special effects or the makeup, is what makes it entertaining. Fans who are in their mid-thirties always tell me that when they were children, they became terrified of eating mushrooms after they saw the movie."

He also directed *The Secret of the Telegian* (1960), *Godzilla Vs. the Sea Monster* (1966), *Godzilla Vs. MechaGodzilla* (1974) and many other movies.)

AK: The manner in which Mr. Fukuda worked was very different from the one in which Mr. Kurosawa worked. Mr. Fukuda gave the actors a great deal of freedom.

CM: Was Mr. Fukuda any more or less enthusiastic about making monster films than Mr. Honda?

AK: I think he was equally enthusiastic about making them. All directors always try to do their best. The kind of movie on which they are working does not matter. Directors are limited by the size of the budget and the amount of time that they have to shoot a film, but they always try to do their best within these constraints.

CM: With which of the other actors who worked on the science fiction movies produced by Toho during the 1960s did you most enjoy working?

AK: Mr. Tsuchiya. Working with him always was very enjoyable. Mr. Tsuchiya often would do very funny things during rehearsals. All of the members of the staff and cast would laugh at his jokes. Mr. Tsuchiya would be-

come very serious when shooting began, but that also was very funny.

CM: Did you or any of the other actors who worked on the science fiction films ever grow tired of working on them?

AK: No. We never grew tired of working on them. Even Mr. Sahara, who worked on more of the movies than any of the other actors, never grew tired of working on them.

It is a joy to me that children whose parents are in their thirties or forties become aware that I am in some of the *Godzilla* films when they see them on VHS tape or laserdisc. Children often point and say, "Hey, it's Uncle Godzilla!" when they see me. It's very heart-warming.

CM: Were actors reluctant to work on science fiction movies back in the 1960s?

AK: I know that some were, but I can't think of anyone in particular. Science fiction films were considered second-rate, so some actors did not want to work on them.

I still receive fan letters from overseas. *Godzilla Vs. Monster Zero*, *Destroy All Monsters* and so on are mentioned in every one of them. So, I am glad that I worked on some of the *Godzilla* movies.

CM: Were you ever a member of Toho Geino? (It is an organization of actors who work for Toho.)

AK: No. I never belonged to the organization. I know that Tadao Takashima and Yasuko Sawaguchi are members. (Ms. Sawaguchi is best known as Naoko Okumura, the woman who takes part in conducting research which leads to the discovery that *Godzilla* can be lured with sound simulating the chirping of birds in *Godzilla 1985*. Mr. Takashima is best known as Shu Sakurai, the leader of the expedition to Farou Island in *King Kong Vs. Godzilla* and Dr. Kusumi, the leader of the scientific research team in *Son of Godzilla*.)

CM: How did you come to appear in *Gamera — Giant Monster Decisive Air Battle*? (It, like the eight earlier *Gamera* films, was produced by the Daiiei Company Limited.)

AK: I think that either the director and the producer or the casting director wanted to show a familiar face from the *Godzilla* series and a familiar face from the *Gamera* series together in one scene. (Kojiro Hongo, who is best known as Kasuke, one of the fortune hunters in *Gamera Vs. Baragon*, and the scoutmaster in *Destroy All Planets*, also appears in the movie.)

CM: What was working with Shusuke Kaneko like? (Mr. Kaneko directed *Gamera — Giant Monster Decisive Air Battle*.)

AK: I couldn't tell you much about Mr. Kaneko because I worked only on one scene. However, I sensed that he was very enthusiastic. In addition, I felt that he took his work very seriously.

CM: Have the science fiction films on which you have worked been very successful?

AK: I'm an actor and not a studio executive, so I don't know how successful they have been. However, I do know that the *Godzilla* movies have been more successful than any of the other science fiction films produced in Japan. The only exception to this that I can think of is *Mothra*. It did very well. It still is very popular, even among young people.

CM: Why do you think that is?

AK: I think the songs in the movie make it popular.

CM: Is it difficult to react to giant monsters that aren't really there?

AK: It is difficult, but actors who appear in

giant monster films must make the people who see the movies believe that the monsters exist. So, the actors must use their abilities to show that they are frightened by the monsters.

CM: How long before the films on which you work go into production are you given copies of the scripts for them?

AK: Usually two to four weeks.

It is not possible for Japanese actors to make enough to live on for the rest of their lives by only working on a few movies. We have to keep working. I remember that in one year I worked on 12 films. The Japanese movie industry was producing two films every week at the time.

CM: In what year did you work on 12 movies?

AK: 1960.

CM: Do you do much improvisation while you are working on films?

AK: Yes, I do.

I've heard that American actors are not allowed to do much improvisation. I've been told that American movie studios employ dialogue directors to make sure the actors say the lines that they're supposed to say. Japanese studios don't do that. Japanese actors are given a great deal of freedom. We are allowed to improvise.

CM: Have you worked on any television series?

AK: Toho used to have a television studio. I worked on a large number of shows in the studio. I also worked on many of the episodes of *Advisor Mito*, a television series about samurai that was produced by Toei. I usu-

ally played a villain in the series. It was broadcast during the late 1970s.

CM: How was working on TV shows different from working on films?

AK: The schedule was very tight. A scene would be redone only if one of the actors had made a mistake.

CM: Have you done any stage work?

AK: I mainly have been working on the stage for the past 10 years. However, I did work on Kon Ichikawa's version of *Chushingura* (1994) last year. (Mr. Ichikawa also directed *The Burmese Harp* (1956), *Makioka Sisters* (1983) and a large number of other movies.)

CM: Do you most enjoy working on films, television series, or plays?

AK: I enjoy working on all three. Each offers actors unique means of expressing themselves. However, since I have been working on movies the longest, I would have to say that I most enjoy working on them.

CM: Which of the films in which you appear are your favorites?

AK: *Sound of the Waves*, which is based on a novel by Yukio Mishima. I'm very fond of that movie. I also like the science fiction films on which I've worked. Many people recognize me from them.

CM: Which of your roles were most enjoyable for you?

AK: I can't choose any particular roles. I enjoyed all of them. I think it's very important for an actor to be able to enjoy playing many different kinds of characters.

CM: Which of your roles were most challenging for you?

AK: I, like all of the other members of my

generation, had a great deal of admiration for soldiers when I was young. So playing them has been very challenging for me. (*Admiral Yamamoto* (1968) and *Battle of the Japan Sea* (1969) are among the war movies in which Mr. Kubo appears.)

CM: Do you find working on period pieces very challenging?

AK: I sometimes would pretend that I was a samurai when I was a child. So, working on period pieces is very enjoyable and very challenging for me.

CM: Are there any American actors whom you especially admire?

AK: Jack Lemmon. I at one time very much admired the lifestyle of Lemmon's character in *The Apartment* (1960).

CM: Are you currently working?

AK: I am now appearing in a show that is playing at the Shinjuku Koma Theater. It's a special kind of theater. The show features a very famous singer playing a heroine.

CM: Are you going to work on any more films in the near future?

AK: I soon will begin working on one called *Virgin Road*. It's not going to be shown in theaters. It's just going to be used for educational purposes.

CM: What will it be about?

AK: It will be about a bride. I'm going to play the father of the bride.

CM: How do you feel about TriStar Pictures producing a Godzilla movie in the United States?

AK: I'm glad that a Godzilla film is going to be produced in the United States. I certainly would accept an offer to be in the movie. ■

SIZZLIN' SUMMER SLOP

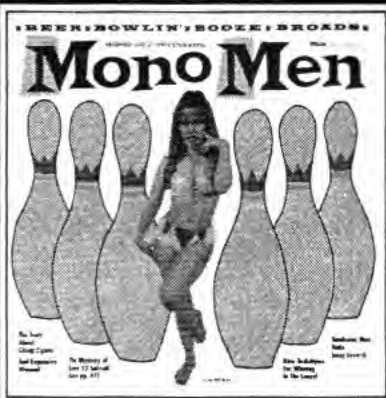


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Serial Box Chapter Two:

The Exploits of Nyoka



Kay Aldridge as Nyoka with Clayton Moore in *Perils of Nyoka*.

By John Marshall

What is it about the concept of a gorgeous, buxom, athletic white woman living in the jungle that excites the imagination of audiences everywhere? Perhaps it's the fact that she can slit a tiger's throat while still looking glamorous, evading the realities that African jungles are in short supply of both beauty parlors and tigers? Why, sure! Sexy heroines seem especially suited for adventure serials set in a jungly vein.

Of course, there had been many females in the jungle adventures of the serials, but for the most part, they had been love interests for male serial heroes. All that changed when Republic released *Jungle Girl* in 1941. Most of the stars of the earliest serials had been women, beginning with the pretty, plump and popular Mary Fuller in the embryonic chapter play *What Happened To Mary?* in 1913. But since the serials began to talk, men had taken over as the leads. *Jungle Girl* proved that women had the ability to look beautiful, dangle from cliffs, and carry heroic dialogue all at once. (Well, some could, anyway.)

The journey to the screen for this story is more complicated than with most serials. It is based (sort of) on a 1932 novel of the same name by an obscure writer named Edgar Rice Burroughs, who had managed to have a serial or two also produced based on a character of his called Tarzan, a white man raised by apes (snicker) in the African jungle. His novel *Jungle Girl* was, of course, intended as the distaff side of this concept.

Republic bought the rights to the exciting story of an unnamed *Jungle Girl* and her buddy, American physician Gordon Kin. Well, Republic canned Kin and added he-man white hunter Jack Stanton. They also christened the *Jungle Girl* Nyoka Meredith. According to the serial storyline, Nyoka's father had retreated to a jungle headquarters after his evil twin brother Bradley had screwed up both their lives. But Bradley followed Nyoka's pop into the jungle and teamed up with an American gangster and a crooked medicine man to get at an enormous supply of diamonds.

This serial-friendly storyline began one of the true classics of the chapter play, a lavish (by serial standards), action-packed adventure filled with everything that made serials great. In fact, the definitive photograph that accompanies most any published mention of movie serials is a still from *Jungle Girl* in which Frances Gifford's Nyoka recoils in hor-

ror as a "gorilla" raises his false arms to attack her in a cramped jungle hut, with only the hut's support beam between them. Yeah, that one!

Jungle Girl had a tremendous advantage in the casting of Frances Gifford, an incredibly beautiful actress. As Nyoka, she wore a large-stitched outfit with short skirt and leopard-skin belt, a sort of Banana Republic by way of *The Flintstones*. The cast was rounded out just as well as Nyoka, with Trevor Bardette as the father/evil brother, veteran heavy Frank Lackteen as a suspiciously Anglo-African medicine man, future *Angry Red Planet* star Gerald Mohr as the gangster, and Tom Neal, clean cut as ever, as heroic Jack Stanton. Comic relief was supplied by Eddie Acuff as Curly Rogers and (unintentionally) Emil Van Horn as a "gorilla."

Stunts were handled for Nyoka by both female and otherwise-gendered stunt persons. Dave Sharpe ably subbed for Frances Gifford much of the time, doing the kinds of falls and things that would have endangered Frances and the shooting schedule. Besides, Dave had better legs. As a matter of fact, his legs were also better than fellow stunt — err — person Helen Thurston, who doubled for Gifford in many other harrowing shots that required a female-type face for the camera. William Witney and John English directed, thus add-



SERIAL QUEEN FACES HARROWING TORTURE IN CHAPTER THRILLER

Biography

Lovely Frances Gifford, starring in "Jungle Girl," Republic's re-release of the thrilling serial which shows every at the Theatre, faces death in such varied ways as being tossed from a cliff, boiled in oil, trapped in a flood, sacrificed by an African priest, burned at the stake, buried in an avalanche and trampled by an elephant.



Tom Neal and Frances Gifford, stars of "Jungle Girl," Republic's re-release of the action-packed, fifteen chapter serial thriller. (1 Col. 11A)

Strange Antipathy

Although he is one of the most active of the swashbuckling heroes of Republic's serial "Jungle Girl," a re-release which will play every at the Theatre, Eddie Acuff in private life strenuously disapproves of any form of physical exercise. This antipathy springs from the fact that he was kicked in the face by an opposing football player during his high school days.

Thrill Of His Life

Tom Neal lists as the greatest moment of his life, the time he received his first rifle, a 22 Winchester, at the age of ten. Neal is cast in the male lead opposite Frances Gifford in Republic's thrilling serial, "Jungle Girl," a re-release which plays every at the Theatre.

Actor-Farmer

Eddie Acuff, the "Curly" of Republic's "Jungle Girl," a re-release of the thrilling serial playing every at the Theatre, owns a farm near Hot Springs, Arkansas, to which he hopes to retire some day.

Costumes Of Fur

Latest styles in animal-skin clothing are modeled by Frances Gifford in Republic's serial, "Jungle Girl," a re-release which will play every at the Theatre for weeks. She wears seven different types of animal skins as costumes, and none of them are as low as knee length.

The safe and sane environment of Frances' upbringing in no way fitted her for the perils she was to face before the cameras as a serial queen. She was born in Long Beach, California and in high school took all the dramatic courses she could cram in, planning a career as a woman lawyer.

Frances is the first person in her family to have any connection with the film industry. She had often read of the Cinderella stories that happen in Hollywood, but never dreamed of becoming an actress until one day, just before leaving for college, she visited a Sam Goldwyn set and was invited to make a screen test. Then and there Frances had to choose between college and a career as an actress. She elected the latter, and has become one of the most promising of the screen's young leading ladies.

Following Hunches

Tom Neal believes in following hunches. He accepted the leading male role in Republic's "Jungle Girl" serial because a friend had returned from the South American jungles at the time with exciting tales, and the role developed into one of the most successful of his career. "Jungle Girl," a re-release, shows every at the Theatre with Frances Gifford starring.



Gerald Mohr and Frances Gifford, currently appearing in "Jungle Girl," Republic's re-release of the fifteen chapter serial thriller. (2 Col. 21B)

TOM NEAL BIG HIT IN THRILL PACKED "JUNGLE GIRL" SERIAL

Born far from the jungle, where he is placed in his current film, "Jungle Girl," Republic's re-release of the thrilling serial, showing every at the Theatre, Tom Neal is convinced he must have been a habitue of the tropics in a previous incarnation, so readily did he become adapted to the jungle background during the filming of the serial. His birthplace was Evanston, Illinois, where his father was a banker and prominent citizen.

He lived in Evanston the first nineteen years of his life and

then his father retired and the family moved to Fort Lauderdale, Florida.

In 1935 he went to New York and appeared in two Theatre Guild productions, following these came a rapid succession of stage plays, in each one of which he scored a personal hit.

He came to Hollywood in 1939 and began a distinguished screen career. He likes the movies, but he admits that, at times, he has a nostalgic longing for the stage — his first love.

The greatest disappointment of his career was the time he was tested for the role of Teranga in "Hurricane," but missed it by a narrow margin, however, since that time his screen successes have more than recompensed him for that early disappointment.

CAST

Nyoka FRANCES GIFFORD
Jack Stanton TOM NEAL
Meredith-Bardette TREVOR BARDETTE
Slick Latimer GERALD MOHR
Curly Rogers EDDIE ACUFF
Shamba FRANK LACKTEEN
Wakimbo TOMMY COOK
Bombo ROBERT BARRON
Latumbi AL KIKIME
Brook BUD GRARY
Claggett AL TAYLOR
Baw JOE MCGUINN
The Lion Chief JERRY FRANK
Mananga KENNETH TERRELL

CREDITS

Associate Producer: Hiram S. Brown, Jr.
Directed by: William Witney — John English
Original Screen Play by: Ronald Davidson, Norman S. Hall, William Lively, Joseph O'Donnell, Joseph F. Poland, Alfred Batson
Based on the Famous Novel "Jungle Girl" by Edgar Rice Burroughs
Production Manager: Al Wilson
Unit Manager: Mark D'Agostino
Photographed by: Reggie Lanning
Film Editors: Edward Todd, William Thompson
Musical Score: Cy Feuer

RCA SOUND SYSTEM
A REPUBLIC SERIAL
IN 15 CHAPTERS



Frances Gifford, Tommy Cook and Eddie Acuff, shown in a scene from "Jungle Girl," Republic's re-release of the fifteen chapter serial thriller. (2 Col. 21A)

STORY

Dr. Meredith, (Trevor Bardette) driven from society by the criminal activities of his twin brother, takes his young daughter, Nyoka, (Frances Gifford) into the African jungle. She grows up with only the savages for her friends.

Because Dr. Meredith is able to cure the natives of their various ills, they regard him as a super-man, thus incurring the disfavor of the native witch doctor, Shamba, (Frank Lackteen).

Dr. Meredith's wicked twin brother learns of the vast store of diamonds to which the Dr. has access, and determined to gain possession of this fabulous wealth in gems, joins forces with the criminal element, stirring up unrest among the natives.

Jack Stanton (Tom Neal) and Curly Rogers, (Eddie Acuff) aviators, come to the jungle and champion the cause of Nyoka. With their help, Nyoka outwits the criminals and peace returns to the jungle country.

Official Billing "JUNGLE GIRL"

A Re-Release with
FRANCES GIFFORD
TOM NEAL
and
Trevor Bardette
Gerald Mohr
Eddie Acuff
Frank Lackteen
Tommy Cook
Directed by
William Witney — John English
Original Screen Play by
Ronald Davidson, Norman S. Hall, William Lively, Joseph O'Donnell, Joseph F. Poland, Alfred Batson
Based on the Famous Novel "Jungle Girl" by Edgar Rice Burroughs
Associate Producer
Hiram S. Brown, Jr.
A REPUBLIC SERIAL
IN 15 CHAPTERS

THRILLING SERIAL SET IN THE JUNGLE OF DARKEST AFRICA

Advance

An announcement of great interest to local serial fans is the booking of Republic's re-release of "Jungle Girl" into the Theatre where it will play weekly for weeks.

The hinterland of Africa is the setting for this cliff-hanger, with Frances Gifford playing the role of "Nyoka" the white girl who was taken into the jungle to live during her infancy, and who has grown up with only the savages for her friends.

Trevor Bardette, playing the role of her father, is the doctor driven from society by the misdeeds of his twin brother. Because he is able to cure the natives of their various ills, they regard him as a super-man, thus incurring the disfavor of the native Witch Doctor, played by Frank Lackteen, who joins forces with the criminal element which comes into the jungle to depose Bardette and gain possession of the vast store of diamonds from which he draws, from time to time, to get money for medical supplies.

Tom Neal has the leading male role, that of the young aviator who with his friend Curly, played by Eddie Acuff, comes to the jungle and champions the cause of Nyoka and her father, Tommy Cook is cast as "Kimbu" the little native boy.

THRILLING SERIAL OFF TO GOOD START

Review

"Jungle Girl," Republic's re-release of the thrilling serial got off to a smashing start when Episode one opened at the Theatre.

Frances Gifford, "The Jungle Girl," portrays the daughter of a physician who has been driven from civilization by the criminal activities of his twin brother. Thus, "Nyoka" — as she is called by the jungle folk — grows to womanhood with the natives her only companions, with the exception of her father.

All is well until agents of the Jungle Girl's father's twin brother, coveting the vast diamond stores to which he has access, enter the jungle and stir up unrest among the natives. A handsome aviator, played by Tom Neal, comes to the region with his pal, Curly, and the pair are instrumental in helping Nyoka and her father outwit the criminal element.

Trevor Bardette has the role of Meredith and Tommy Cook is cast as Kimbu, the little native boy who helps the Jungle Girl and her friends out of many a tight situation.



Gerald Mohr and Frances Gifford, currently appearing in "Jungle Girl," Republic's re-release of the fifteen chapter serial thriller. (1 Col. 12A)

ing an even greater pedigree to credits.

The serial was popular, but never re-run due to copyright and contract complications with Burroughs. Fortunately, the name Nyoka was a creation of Republic, and the name was all they really needed. The next year, Nyoka returned with a new last name, new costume, new companion (Fang, played by Ace the Wonder Dog) and new face.

Due to the legal machinations involved, the reworking of Nyoka prevented even the star, Frances Gifford, to return. Fortunately, there was an equally beautiful actress available. Kay Aldridge had been trying to break into stardom for years. She had been struggling along in bit parts in features ("Cigarette, sir?") without making much of an impression. However, by being game enough to dip her hand in the serial bowl, Kay Aldridge was rewarded not only with the role of Nyoka but also the mantle of Republic's reigning serial queen.

Stuntfolks Dave Sharpe and Helen Thurston returned to play Nyoka for the tuff stuff. For comic relief, William Benedict appeared with his monkey pal Jitters (Professor, the wonder monkey). Benedict had also livened up the best serial of all time, *The Adventures of Captain Marvel*.

For *Perils of Nyoka* (now Nyoka Gordon) is assisted by future Lone Ranger Clayton Moore as Dr. Larry Grayson and Forbes Murray as his boss, Professor Campbell. It seems the prof has located a valuable papyrus that tells of the location of (get this) the Golden Tablets of Hippocrates, which contain the secrets of curing disease. Faster than you can say "scene change" they are off to the Arabian desert. Nyoka is also in search of her father, Professor Gordon, who obviously changed his



name from Meredith to avoid appearing in the sequel.

Also after the tablets is the villainous Vultura, ably assisted by her hench-creature, a "gorilla" named Satan, once again played by Emil Van Horn. Vultura was finally done in at spearpoint by Satan himself (the "gorilla," that is). William Witney directed all 15 chapters single-handed, but the end product is just as exciting as the original. Serial vet Reggie Lanning contributed some of his best camera work as well.

The vile, vivacious, voluptuous villainess



Frances Gifford was the original Nyoka in *Jungle Girl*.

Vultura was played by Lorna Gray, an actress with an extensive career on both sides of the law in the serials. Lorna co-starred in *Captain America*, *Deadwood Dick*, and *Flying G-Men*, plus more villainy as the repulsively reprehensible Rita in *Federal Operator 99*. She finally got her own starrer as *The Daughter Of Don Q*, after changing her name to the less-sexy but more virtuous-sounding Adrian Booth. As Lorna Gray, the actress was so popular with producers as well as audiences that she actually earned more moolah as the villain in *Nyoka* than Kay Aldridge made as Nyoka!

Kay Aldridge became the queen of Republic's serials. After co-starring with Clayton Moore in *Perils*, Kay later joined Allan Lane for *Daredevils Of The West* (1943) and Kane (*Spy Smasher*) Richmond in *Haunted Harbor* (1944). After several years of non-stop work, Kay Aldridge left Republic, only to have her shoes filled by another star in the making, Linda Stirling. Her first starring role was also a jungle epic, *The Tiger Woman*, which even co-starred Kay's previous leading man, Allan (Rocky) Lane.

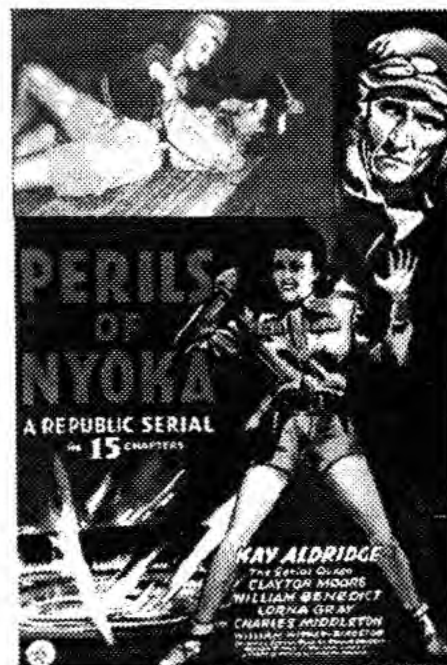
Perils Of Nyoka was so popular, in fact, that it inspired a comic strip rather than the other way around as was the usual case. It also

inspired a remake — kind of. Republic's next-to-last serial, *Panther Girl Of The Congo* (1955), had former "Lois Lane" Phyllis Coats dressed in Nyoka's original outfit (to match the voluminous stock footage reused from *Jungle Girl*).

Jungle Girl and *Perils Of Nyoka* had everything you could ask for in a serial (well, two serials). They hold up today as two of the greatest examples of what the genre had to offer.

Bibliography: You absolutely must read *Cliffhanger* by Alan G. Barbour (A&W Publishers, 1977); *The Great Movie Serials* by Jim Harmon and Don Glut (who else) (Doubleday 1972); and *Continued Next Week* by Kalton Lahue (University of Oklahoma Press, 1964).

Commentary: In "Serial Box Chapter One," I mentioned that Lyle Talbot had appeared in *Gamerra The Invincible*. Of course I was thinking of Brian Donlevy. Also, my comment about racial slurs being "a shot of tequila for the soul" referred to the fact that everyone in America has to deal with racial tension every day, and that a brief comment (in private, never in public) is a useful and harmless way to let off steam. At least I'm honest enough with myself to admit it. Now please excuse me, I have a cross in the oven. ■



Chapter 15: SATAN'S FURY

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- Ghostly Love**
Forbidden love between man and sexy ghosts! (X)
- Ghoul Sex Squad**
Hopping vampire/hardcore sex thrills from Hong Kong! (XXX)
- Girl Gangs**
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2 horny cops blow the heads off rapists in the goofiest, goriest police series ever!
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- Hit And Rape 3&4**
More wacky sex'n'gorefest adventures in the big city! Jap. only. **Animated**. (X)
- Holy Virgin Vs. Evil Dead**
Softcore sex with naked girls & evil ghosts, Hong Kong style! (X)
- Lust Never Dies**
Hopping Vampires, hardcore sex, and crazy kung-fu! In Chinese. (XXX)
- Man of A Nasty Spirit**
Juicy softcore HK porn/horror! (X)
- Mercenary Cannibals**
Unbelievably gory kung-fu ripoff of "Apocalypse Now" and "Dawn of the Dead!" hilariously dubbed in English!
- Mind Fuck**
Wow! Hardcore sex, ninjas & vampires!
Very bizarre. (XXX)
- Rape Me Till I Like It**
She learns to respect her rapist! In Chinese language only. (XXX)
- Riki-Oh**
Amazingly gory & stylized ultra-violent Japanese super-spectacular! (X)
- Smile Again, Sweet Whore**
Sleazy, succulent Chinese softcore sex epic! (X)
- We Are Going To Eat You!**
Village of Leatherface lookalikes chops up unwary visitors with meat-cleaver kung-fu! Ultra-gore from HK! (X)

Euro-Gore Splatter! (All films below are in English!)

- The Aliennators**
Uncut LBX print of hilariously sleazy Italian "Terminator" and "Aliens" ripoff!
- The Beyond**
Uncut LBX Lucio Fulci splatter classic, loaded with zombie gore! (X)
- Beyond Darkness**
Uncut version of Joe D'Amato's "Buried Alive"! Necrophiliac creep mutilates pretty young girls! (X)
- Bloody Moon**
Uncut Jesus Franco! Deformed freak kills girls! (X)
- Cannibal Apocalypse**
John Saxon stars in the uncut version of "Invasion of the Flesh Hunters", with all of the missing gore scenes intact!!! (X)
- Cannibal Holocaust**
Uncut, uncensored sleaze classic, full of rape, torture, and graphic death!!! (X)
- Cat in the Brain**
A naked girl is ground up to feed hungry flesh-eating pigs! Uncut Fulci gore! (X)
- City of the Living Dead**
Uncut LBX version of "The Gates of Hell"! Super-gory Lucio Fulci classic!
Dope-smoking retard gets drill thru head!
- Contamination**
Uncut ultra-gory version of "Alien Contamination" by Luigi Cozzi! (X)
- Deep Red**
105-min LBX print of Argento's crimson classic contains *all* of the missing gore!
- Faceless**
Uncut Jesus Franco! Pretty girls are mutilated! Telly Savalas stars! (X)
- Grim Reaper**
Uncut Joe D'Amato fave features a cannibal eating a human fetus! Yum! (X)
- Grim Reaper 2**
Uncut Joe D'Amato sequel! Gory! (X)
- Let Sleeping Corpses Lie**
Uncut LBX zombie gore classic!
- Make Them Die Slowly**
Cannibals torture topless girls! (X)
- New York Ripper**
Uncut sexy horror is a misogynist's wet dream, from Lucio Fulci! (X)
- Tenebrae**
Uncut LBX Argento slasher includes the infamous "spurring stump" sequence!
- Trap Them & Kill Them**
Emanuelle meets breast-chomping cannibals! Uncut D'Amato! (X)

Sexy Euro-Sleaze!!! (In English unless otherwise noted.)

- Autopsy**
Uncut necrophilia fantasy! (X)
- The Beast**
Uncut uncensored beast rapist! By Walerian Borowczyk. French only. (X)
- The Demons**
Jesus Franco's witchcraft torture and lesbian seduction fun! (X)
- Deported Women of the SS**
Erotic Nazi torture sleaze with pubic hair shaving and bloody vaginas! (X)
- Erotic Rites of Frankenstein**
Uncut Jesus Franco sex-monsters! Naked monster-worshippers! (X)
- Gestapo's Last Orgy**
Killer cannibal Nazis eat human flesh and have sleazy sex! (X)
- Girl in the Transparent Panties**
Uncut Franco sleaze! Spanish only. (X)
- Mondo Weirdo**
Blood-drinking lesbians force nubile girl captive to eat her own bloody menstrual secretions! Fascinating! (XXX)
- Nazi Love Camp #27**
Busty beauties sentenced to nasty Nazi rape orgies! Non-stop sleaze! (XXX)
- Paprika: Life in a Brothel**
Buxom whores in action, from Tinto Brass, director of "Caligula"! Italian. (X)
- Perverts On Parade**
Hardcore hell-cheating housewife sex! In German language only. (XXX)
- Porno Holocaust**
Ugly sex mutant rapes chicks with radioactive penis! Uncut D'Amato sleaze! In Italian language only. (XXX)
- Slave Sex 2**
More S&M bondage orgies! In German language only. (XXX)
- SS Bordello**
Gestapo goons take over a brothel! Twisted Nazi sex ensues! French (XXX)
- SS Extermination Camp**
Best Nazi sex'n'torture film in the history of sleaze! Ultimate in vile rape, torture and violence! A bald tit maniac! (X)
- SS Hell Camp**
Crazed Nazi female doctor creates an insane testosterone monster that bites off women's pubic hair! Yikes! (X)
- Virgins For the Roman Empire**
A Joe D'Amato porn classic! Pulsating purple pussy toga gals & sexy wrestling! In Italian language only. (XXX)

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Married To Science



Bela Lugosi teaches Frank Moran about the finer points of the Cuban cigar in *Return of the Ape Man*.

by Brad Linaweaver

Back before Michael Medved went insane and started calling for a "slasher tax" on violent movies, he corresponded briefly with Yours Truly. I was writing a bad movies column at the time, "Der Krapp," and had reviewed *The Golden Turkey Awards*. Medved more or less liked the review. I more or less liked the book he did with his brother. But as I used to stress in the column, I never made fun of a film's ineptitude where I did not also single out individuals who did their jobs well. (That's the real problem with something like *Mystery Science Theater 3000*. They talk over the good stuff. And half the time their comments aren't as funny as the flubbed lines and wooden acting they also like to talk over.)

The most popular series of "Der Krapp" columns I did (in *Video Entertainment* and *Video Swapper* in the early '80s) covered the films Bela Lugosi made for Sam Katzman's Banner productions at Monogram. Unlike the *Golden Turkey* approach, I spent more time on the pleasures than the drawbacks of watching these odd little films.

I never denied that a mediocre script was worse than *Somnec*; but Lugosi's Poverty Row cheapies were never boring, partly due to the special awfulness of the scripts. These pictures were far too weird to play it safe! Anticipating the style that Ed Wood ultimately perfected, the characters often speak in non-sequiturs, each person inhabiting a world of his own where dialogue never really connects. Anyone who has ever been married can appreciate the demented genius at work here. It's like several different movies got into a big wreck on the highway... and the results are comic.

I love all the horror actors and actresses. Every single one! If I must pick a favorite, I'm a traditionalist and go with Boris Karloff. But I developed an incredible respect for Lugosi by watching him save movies that would never be remembered without him. That's why I used to see red when I picked up John Stanley's *Creature Features Movie Guide* and would read his attacks on virtually everything Lugosi ever did, even the acknowledged classics. (Stanley trashed *White Zombie* as "decrepit." Regarding *Dark Eyes of London*, he said that Lugosi "in a dual role doesn't necessarily double your pleasure." It didn't take a Criswell to predict what Stanley thought about the Monogram and PRC efforts.)

So when I laugh at bad stuff that deserves derision I'm very careful to admire the good stuff, too. The good stuff is why we stayed up late at night to watch lousy prints of these old movies. A Lugosi performance was always worth losing a night's sleep.

There is no magazine today that had done more to honor Lugosi's achievement than *Cult Movies*.

With that in mind, I'd like to offer a modest commentary on an ideal double-bill of two Lugosi mad scientist roles from Monogram, *Return of the Ape Man* and *Black Dragons*.

Nobody did mad scientist roles better than Bela, not even George Zucco or Lionel Atwill. Bringing with him all the anti-social baggage of cinema's most evil Dracula (Christopher Lee is the only other Dracula who works for me), Lugosi never needs to justify anything to anyone! That's why it's so funny in PRC's *Devil Bat* (because of a script not rewritten for Bela) that the townspeople never suspect kindly old Doc Carruthers. Those of us out in the audience instantly side with Bela in his murder spree because the other people in the movie are simply too stupid to live. Every time he says, "Good bye," to the next victim, we chortle along with him. In the middle of World War II, while all respectable movies are preaching the virtues of democracy and the average guy over and over and over and over, we can spend a few pleasant moments with old Doc Lugosi and watch him kill off a whole town of failed idiots from a Frank Capra film.



Black Dragons

Which brings us to *Return of the Ape Man*. I just love this movie. It's my favorite of this select group of Poverty Row wonders. When I helped run a film series at Florida State University a million years ago (in the early '70s), the projectionist, Michael Ogden, and I, as one of the box-office managers, loved marathons and the annual Weird Night because we could satisfy our taste for these strange films. Normal humans assumed we were booking these pics to add to the endurance contest of, say, 15 hours of straight horror movies. Ha, little did they know...

When Michael was able to afford a 16mm print

of a feature movie, he didn't hesitate to acquire his own copy of *Return of the Ape Man*. Studying this masterpiece was more important than worrying about Nixon and the Vietnam War. We had to find the answers to the following pop quiz!

1.) If you are a great scientist and you have just discovered how to bring people back to life who have frozen to death, what do you do next?

- a.) Go to a local hospital and offer your services for the good of mankind;
- b.) Announce your discovery to the world, publish, give lectures, and do everything in your power to accelerate acceptance of these new techniques;
- c.) Go into business with it;
- d.) Turn it over to the military (what with the war raging and everything);
- e.) Become the greatest magician of all time, with a return-from-the-dead act that would top anything by Houdini;
- f.) Mount an expedition to the arctic on the off-chance that you will find a complete specimen of Neanderthal man frozen in the ice that you can bring back home and thaw out.

The correct answer, of course, is (f). I mean, what other choice could a rational scientist make? Let's see if you do better on the next question. We'll make it easier by reducing the number of choices.

2.) When you have brought the Neanderthal man back to life, do you:

- a.) Keep him in his natural state so that you can study him properly?

b.) Take out part of John Carradine's brain and put it in the prehistoric man's head so that the subject of your experiment will be able to play the piano, say a few words and kill off an annoying wife?

Surely this time the answer is clear. But for those of you falling on the wrong end of the Bell Curve, the correct answer is (b). Let us continue.

3.) When cops ask you why bullets have no effect on the Neanderthal man, do you answer:

- a.) "You idiots must be missing!"
- b.) "Only fire will destroy him. Fire is his master. He probably never understood it."

This is a moment of Monogram metaphysics. Obviously the answer is (b).

4.) When you are at a dull party, looking for a likely brain donation before you become so pissed off with Carradine that you take his brain, do you say:

- a.) "You know, some people's brains wouldn't be missed."
- b.) "You know, some people's brains wouldn't be missed."

This is a trick question. We'll make up for it with more choices on the next one.

5.) Speaking of John Carradine, when you've been in the arctic for months and months, and he starts whining about wanting to get home to his wife (who isn't all that hot, to be charitable), do you say:

- a.) "Why, sure, it isn't fair to ask you to spend the rest of your life in front of a rear screen projection."

b.) "You ingrate! Grab a pick-axe and replace that extra back there who is swinging his tool inches above the ground because he doesn't want to damage the cheap set!"

c.) "Don't mind me. I'll just stay up here in the long, long night when it comes. I'll be fine. You just do what you have to do."

d.) "A true scientist is married to his profession! Yes, the answer must be (d). But before you receive your final grade, here is one question not aimed at the Lugosi point-of-view character.

6.) If you're a Monogram cop, and you've just seen the large footprints left by the ape-man, do you say:

- a.) "Some guy was wearing pretty big boots, I'd say!"
- b.) "Looks like Bozo the clown has broken parole, boys."
- c.) "Didn't you bring me any doughnuts or sweet rolls?"
- d.) "It looks too big to be real."

Yes, the correct answer is (d). I guess that about does it for the science lesson. Next we move to the history lesson, but as the lecture hasn't been given yet, there will be no test.

When I first saw *Black Dragons*, I thought I was dreaming. This wasn't because I'd stayed up too

(continued)

LURID! VIOLENT! SEXY! WILD! LURID! VIOLENT! SEXY! WILD!



CULT MOVIE POSTER SALE!

HOT RODS, MOTORCYCLES, JUVENILE DELINQUENTS, TEEN HORROR, DRUGS, SCI-FI AND BAD GIRLS! All are staples of the golden age of exploitation films. The posters from this era have become highly desirable as an ever growing number of collectors and investors discover these artistic treasures featuring stunning artwork and campy lingo which have become priceless icons of American pop culture. We have been fortunate to find a small number of these rare, original 14" X 22" movie posters ("window card" size) which are all in excellent condition.

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- 6) **TWIST ALL NIGHT** (1961) Fabulous poster of sexy **June Wilkinson** in pin-up poses from this outrageous showcase for the twist craze!
- 7) **GIMME SHELTER** (1971) The classic **Rolling Stones** rockumentary! Great poster!
- 8) **BEACH PARTY** (1963) **Annette Funicello, Frankie Avalon, Brian Wilson, Dick Dale & the Deltones-** "Uninhibited Pagan Rites Performed Each Spring by Uncivilized Boys & Girls!" The very first of those great AIP beach movies.
- 9) **THE ANGRY RED PLANET** (1960) Early color sci-fi shocker with extraordinary special effects. Astronauts battle giant bat/rat/spider animals on Mars!
- 10) **DRAGSTRIP RIOT** (1958) **Connie Stevens, Fay Wray-** "Motorcycle Gangs, Hot Rodders, Death, Romance, and Redemption!" **THE COOL & THE CRAZY-** "Seven Savage Punks on a Weekend of Violence!" Terrific poster art!
- 11) **THE WEIRD WORLD OF LSD** (1967) Remember sitars, Woodstock, damaged chromosomes? (Oops!) Outrageous anti-drug propaganda flick!
- 12) **THE BRAIN FROM PLANET AROUS** (1958) **John Agar-** A giant floating brain (with eyes!) takes over the body of a scientist as its first step in conquering Earth! (Eek!) **TEENAGE MONSTER-** "Teenage Titan of Terror on a Lustful Binge!"
- 13) **BIKINI BEACH** (1964) **Annette Funicello, Frankie Avalon-** The third beach party movie and one of the best! "The Beach Party Gang Goes Dragstrip!"
- 14) **BEACH BLANKET BINGO** (1965) **Annette Funicello, Frankie Avalon, Buster Keaton-** Best of the Beach Party movies! Twistin', surf'n' and skydivin'!
- 15) **DR. DRACULA'S LIVING NIGHTMARES SHOW** (1950's spook-show)- "You Dare Not Look Into His Eyes! On Stage & In Person! Beauties at the Mercy of Inhuman Monsters! Super Scary!" (RARE!)
- 16) **BORN LOSERS** (1967) The introduction of **Billy Jack** and one of the all-time best of the 1960's biker films! Fabulous poster with bikini girl and bikers!
- 17) **THE BRAIN THAT WOULDN'T DIE** (1963) A sci-fi/horror classic! The fun begins when a mad surgeon keeps his fiancée's disembodied head alive and talking after their car wreck! **INVASION OF THE STAR CREATURES-** Amazon women under the control of vegetable-headed aliens! One of our favorite posters!
- 18) **CAREER GIRL** (1959) That buxom **June Wilkinson** shows off her best assets in this steamy poster! June heads for Hollywood to find fame and fortune and ends up at a nudist colony! "You Have to See it to Believe it!"
- 19) **REFORM SCHOOL GIRL** (1957) "Caged Boy-Hungry Wildcats Gone Mad!!!" **ROCK AROUND THE WORLD** "Wild Pulse-Pounding Rock & Roll!" A fabulous poster!
- 20) **ROAD RACER/DADDY-O** (1959) Hot babes, sports cars, drag racing and rock & roll: all in one fabulous poster! What more could you want?
- 21) **TEENAGE THUNDER** (1958) "Revved-Up Youth on a Thrill Rampage!" Teen story of hot rods, speeding and drag races! **CARNIVAL ROCK-** **Susan Cabot & Jonathan Haze** in **Roger Corman's** classic flick of rock & roll, mixed-up love, gamblers, arson and rockabilly!
- 22) **X: THE MAN WITH X-RAY EYES** (1963) **Ray Milland-** "Suddenly He Could See Through Clothes...Flesh...and Walls!" A knock-out poster!
- 23) **REPTILICUS** (1962) Before **Jurassic Park**, there was **Reptilicus!** "A Prehistoric Beast Born 50 Million Years Out of Time!" Run for your lives!!!
- 24) **HORRORS OF THE ORIENT** (1950's spook-show) "On Stage & In Person! The Hollywood Wolf Man! The Hunchback Igor! The Living Zombie on the Loose! NOTICE: We Urge You Not to Panic or Bolt From Your Seats! Sensational! Weird!" (RARE!)
- 25) **BLACK SABBATH** (1964) **Boris Karloff** in tales of a vengeful corpse, phone calls from the dead and a vampire! Creepy!
- 26) **GLORY STOMPERS** (1967) **Dennis Hopper** pre-"Easy Rider" as a motorcycle gang leader "Saddle Your Hogs and Ride, Man!" The ultimate biker poster!
- 27) **JASON & THE ARGONAUTS** (1963) A **Ray Harryhausen** masterpiece with **Todd Armstrong** and **Honor Blackman** searching for the Golden Fleece and meeting up with purple-winged harpies, a merman, a bronze giant and a 7-headed hydra!
- 28) **SORORITY GIRL** (1957) **Susan Cabot** as a high school hellicat whose specialties are catfights and paddling (Hmmm!) **MOTORCYCLE GANG-** Twisted teenage sex, drag racing and gang violence! Like wow, Daddy-O!
- 29) **TALES OF TERROR** (1962) **Vincent Price, Basil Rathbone, Peter Lorre** in 3 Poe tales involving a live burial, a hypnotist and Price melting into an oozing faceless mess! A really outstanding poster!
- 30) **DI MONSTER DIE** (1965) **Boris Karloff, Nick Adams-** H.P. Lovecraft thriller! "The Ultimate in Diabolism!" **PLANET OF THE VAMPIRES-** **Barry Sullivan-** Crazy astro-

nauts, disembodied aliens and giant skeletons!

- 31) **THE HALLUCINATION GENERATION** (1966) **George Montgomery** makes like **Tim Leary** and leads his youthful followers into a psychedelic pill party!
- 32) **ANGELS FROM HELL** (1968) "He's a Cycle Psycho!" Violent Vietnam vet starts motorcycle gang and battles rival bikers and cops!
- 33) **THUNDER ALLEY** (1967) **Annette Funicello-** "Their God is Speed...Their Pleasure is an 'Anytime Girl'" Lurid poster art of party girls and hot rods!
- 34) **TIME TRAVELERS** (1964) Excellent sci-fi story of scientists who journey into the post-nuke future! "SEE: Woman Who Use the Love Machine to Alay the Male Shortage!" (Kinky!) Fantastic sci-fi/horror poster art!
- 35) **THE BIG TNT SHOW** (1966) One of the best 1960's concert films! Features **The Byrds, Donovan, Ronettes, Bo Diddley, Lovin' Spoonful, Ike & Tina** & more!
- 36) **A BUCKET OF BLOOD** (1959) **Roger Corman's** predecessor to "The Little Shop Of Horrors" with beatniks, coffeehouses and gruesome "sculptures"! **THE GIANT LEECHES-** Humongous leeches capture girls and suck their blood! (Yuk!)
- 37) **CHILDREN OF THE DAMNED** (1963) Eerie well-made chiller about demonic space-seed children who seek to rule the Earth! (Yikes!)
- 38) **HOUSE OF USHER** (1960) **Roger Corman's** first Poe movie! **Vincent Price** buries his sister alive in this classic chiller!
- 39) **THE LONGEST DAY** (1962) **John Wayne, Henry Fonda, Rod Steiger, Robert Mitchum, Sean Connery** and loads more in this all-star classic WWII blockbuster!
- 40) **BLACK SUNDAY** (1961) **Barbara Steele** is a witch who returns from the grave to seek revenge after being burned at the stake! Beautifully atmospheric.
- 41) **THE PIT & THE PENDULUM** (1961) **Vincent Price, Barbara Steele-** Price becomes convinced that his scheming wife has been buried alive. He proceeds to go berserk in a giant torture chamber! One of **Roger Corman's** best!
- 42) **SKI PARTY** (1965) **Frankie Avalon, Yvonne "Batgirl" Craig, Dwayne Hickman, James Brown, Lesley Gore-** Another classic beach party movie with **Frankie** and **Dwayne** going in drag! Like wow, Daddy-O!
- 43) **COMEDY OF TERRORS** (1964) **Vincent Price, Boris Karloff, Peter Lorre, Basil Rathbone-** Two undertakers and their bumbling assistant turn to murder to bring in new customers!
- 44) **HAUNTED PALACE** (1963) **Vincent Price** as a warlock who returns from the grave seeking revenge against the villagers who had burned him at the stake! A **Roger Corman** classic also starring **Debra Paget** and **Lon Chaney Jr.**
- 45) **THE ABC'S OF LOVE** (1952) Vintage burlesque film with 4 gorgeous strippers posing on the poster! "Adults Only! See Burlesque's Sexiest Blond!"
- 46) **CIRCUS OF HORRORS** (1960) One of the big three unforgettable sick British shockers dealing with voyeurism, physical deformities and murders!
- 47) **HOW TO STUFF A WILD BIKINI** (1965) **Annette Funicello, Dwayne Hickman, The Kingsmen, Brian Wilson, Buster Keaton-** The craziest of the beach movies!
- 48) **PANIC IN THE YEAR ZERO** (1962) **Ray Milland, Frankie Avalon-** One of the earliest and best post-nuclear holocaust films! Poster art depicts atomic blast leveling Los Angeles. "When Civilization Came to an End!"
- 49) **QUEEN OF BLOOD** (1966) **Basil Rathbone, Dennis Hopper, Forrest J Ackerman-** Astronauts go to Mars and bring home green alien woman who drains their blood! **BLOOD BATH-** **Roger Corman's** tale of a crazed artist and his wax-covered murder victims who come back to life (and, boy, are they mad!)
- 50) **DEVIL'S ANGELS** (1967) Killer bikers head for hideout smashing everything in their way! Lurid and trashy graphics!
- 51) **DIARY OF A BACHELOR** (1964) "He played the game of love like it was Russian Roulette...with pretty girls instead of ammunition!" Great girlie poster!
- 52) **FLESH EATERS** (1964) Outrageous shocker with plane crash survivors trapped on an island with a crazed scientist and his tiny carnivorous creatures! "Free at the Box Office: Instant Blood!"
- 53) **GOLIATH & THE BARBARIANS** (1960) **Steve "Hercules" Reeves** leads rebels to battle savage hordes! Spectacular graphics!
- 54) **PAJAMA PARTY** (1964) **Annette Funicello, Tommy Kirk-** A teenage Martian, a planned invasion of Earth, a robbery, a motorcycle gang and a pajama party!
- 55) **PARADISIO** (1962) **Oxford University** professor gets sunglasses that make everybody appear naked in 3-D! "Everything...but Everything Pops Out of the Screen!"
- 56) **MESA OF LOST WOMEN** (1952) This girlie/sci-fi cult classic is considered by many to be the ultimate grade "Z" thriller. Mad scientist **Jackie "Uncle Fester" Coogan** creates a race of scantily-clad spider women. "Super Women Who Kissed and Killed!" Features **Katherine Victor** (of "Wild World of Batwoman" and "Teen Age Zombies" fame) and **Mona McKinnon** (from "Plan 9 From Outer Space"). We've only seen this super-rare poster up for sale once when it sold in a 1992 Hollywood auction for \$200. This is a "jumbo window card" (22" X 28") with spectacular lurid graphics. Our special price: only \$98.

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Lugosi and the cast from *Black Dragons*

late to watch it on TV. I'd risen early in the morning to open Moore Auditorium so that Mike Ogden could run a full day of non-stop films (on a Saturday, I believe) with *Black Dragons* starting off the festivities. No one showed up until the second film. What this meant was that Mike started the projector and then came down into the theatre where he and I had a private showing.

When the film ended, I stared at the blank screen, convinced that someone had slipped me LSD. There was a lot of LSD going around in those days.

The storyline has Lugosi as a Nazi plastic surgeon who performs such a medical miracle that the film qualifies as science fiction. I don't think the filmmakers intended this - it's sort of science fiction by default - but there's no known method for turning Japanese members of the Black Dragon Society into perfect replicas of Caucasians. We are left with a profound mystery, as well. Why wouldn't a Nazi suggest that Germany could better provide doppelgangers to infiltrate American industry? A lot less work....

No sooner has Doc Lugosi performed this useful service than the treacherous Japs throw him in a cell. His response is to promise the ingrates that the Fuehrer will wipe them out! Then he busies himself with the most ludicrous escape scenario in the history of cinema. (I wouldn't dream of giving it away.)

This sequence comes at the end of the film and explains the almost incomprehensible plot up to this point. Dr. Melcher has disguised himself as a Frenchman, Monsieur Colomb, and both of them speak with thick Hungarian accents. He spends most of the movie tracking down his patients (five of them passing as American industrialists and in a great position to do sabotage). When he finds them, he calls them by their Japanese names then murders them - in one case arranging matters so two eliminate each other. The sixth one he keeps alive, Dr. Saunders, and transforms him into a "hideous monster" while living in the man's house. Meanwhile, the doctor's niece develops a romantic interest in Lugosi. (Older men made out like bandits when most of the young male population was away fighting the war.) Completing a nice triangle is Clayton Moore, FBI agent and future Lone Ranger, who wants the girl for himself. When asked if she'll ever see him again, Lugosi sums up the whole movie with, "Who knows in this crazy world?"

As best as I can make out, the underlying message of this film is: Wouldn't it be nice if the Nazis could put aside their temporary disagreements with Aryan America so as to create a united front against the Yellow Peril? Hitler's declaration of war against the United States a few days after Pearl Harbor was one of those rare occasions when he kept a treaty obligation: and one of his biggest mistakes. There

were many Americans in those days who thought Hitler was too racially tolerant because of his willingness to form an alliance between the Third Reich and an Oriental power!!! *Black Dragons* captures this mood perfectly.

For readers who might think I've been slipped LSD in the course of writing this article, I would like to say a few words.

The McCarthy era was a calm and reasonable period compared to World War II. You'd never know this from reading what today's movie reviewers say about the films of the '40s and '50s. To hear them tell it you'd think McCarthy invented paranoia. They must not watch the same war movies as I do.

Black Dragons cuts closer to the bone than a big studio like Warner Brothers (which did the most Japs-are-under-the-beds movies). There is just as much bile in a Warner Brothers picture, of course, but slick packaging makes it easier to stomach. *Black Dragons* is honest. What's more, *Black Dragons* offers a great value. Here is one movie in no danger of being remade!

The image of Bela Lugosi walking down a city street, suave and composed in a tuxedo, carrying a blow torch in case he finds his lost ape man, is forever burned in my mind. Such a vision inspires last thoughts.

Americans had a love/hate relationship with Lugosi. He was strange. He was foreign. He was deeply European. Boris Karloff was a kindly English uncle. George Zucco and Lionel Atwill were Brits, too. Lon Chaney, Jr., was all American. Peter Lorre was Hungarian, the same as Lugosi; but there the resemblance ends. Lorre embraced Americanism so completely that it took the edge off his foreign qualities.

But there was something about Bela that was genuinely aristocratic and aloof. No matter how hard he tried, he could never be one of the boys. The Poverty Row period of his career in the '40s is best understood with a paraphrase from Milton's Satan:

"Better to reign at Monogram than serve at Universal."

Editor's Note: As to the remark concerning the re-making of Black Dragons - although it was not remade as such, pieces of its original story - Asian spies whose facial features are altered to appear caucasian in order to quietly infiltrate US government - were used as a plot device in an episode of Outer Limits entitled "The 100 Days of the Dragon" which aired in September of 1963. ■

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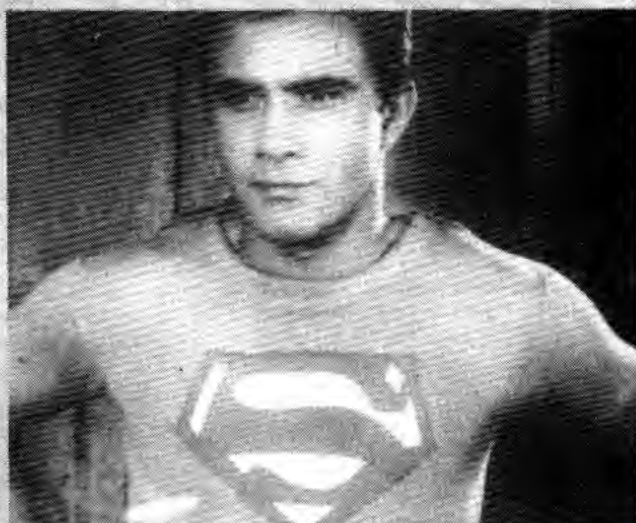
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